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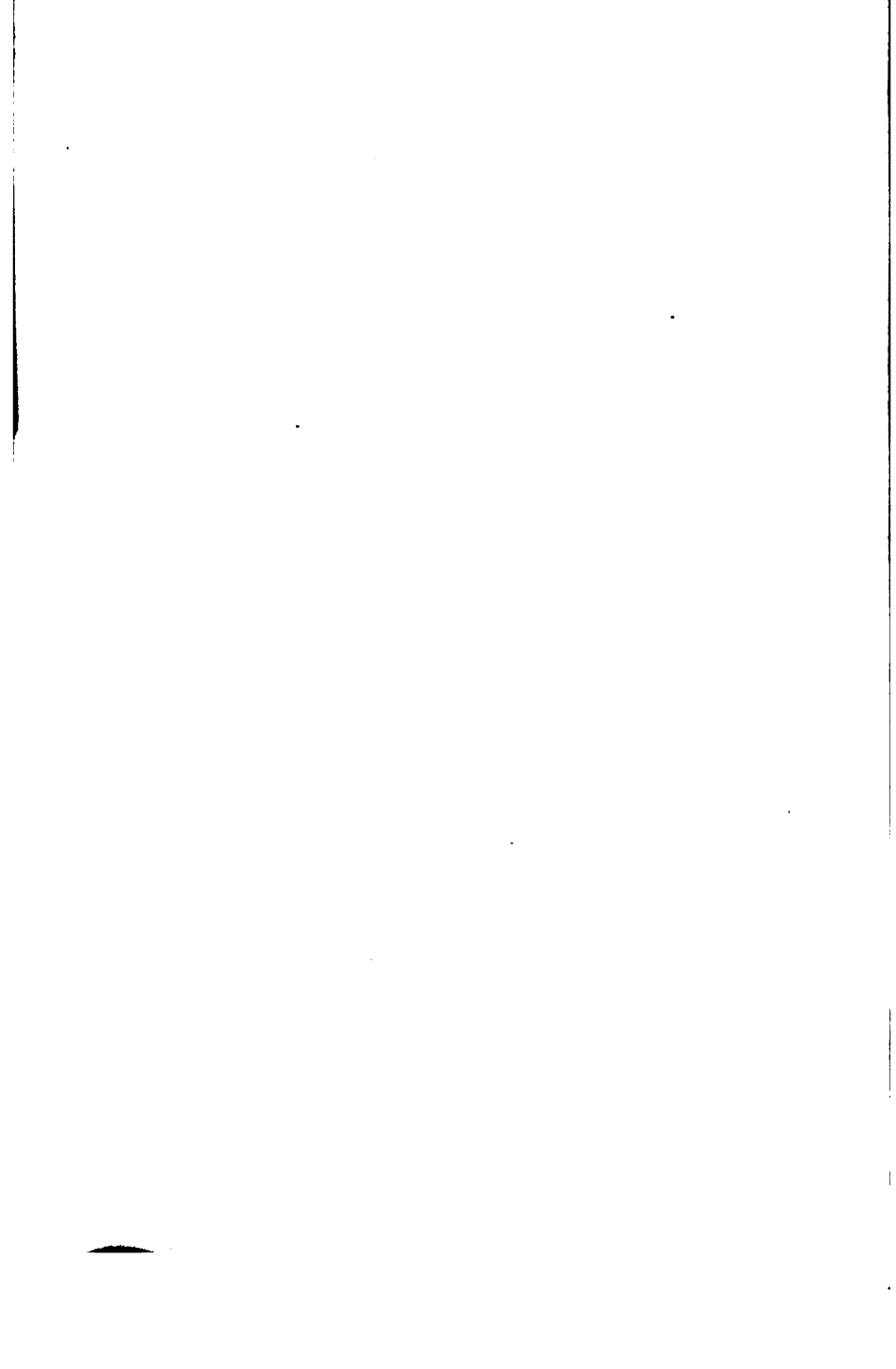
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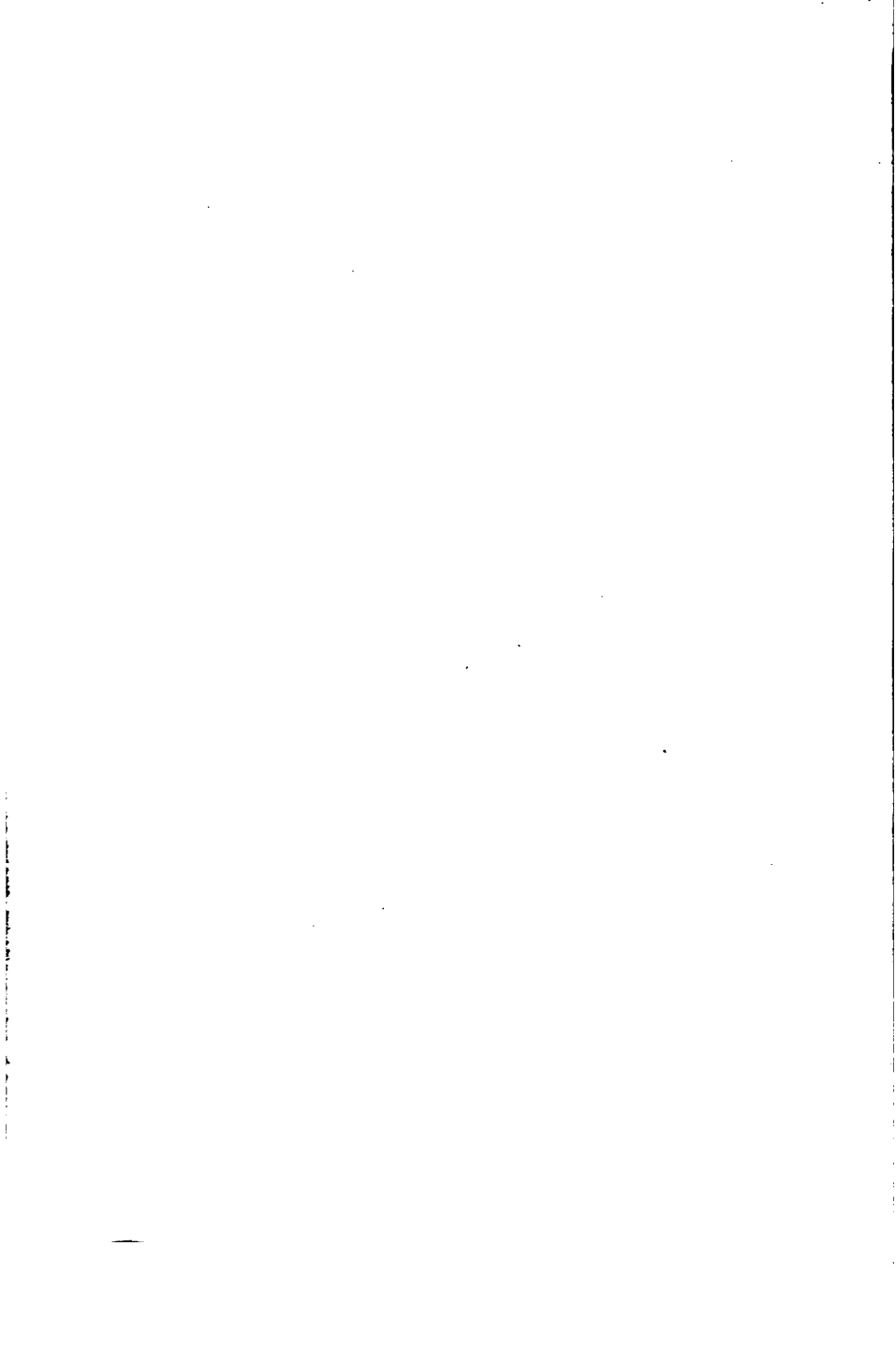
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THE HUDSON & OTHER POEMS

BY

GEORGE S. HELLMAN

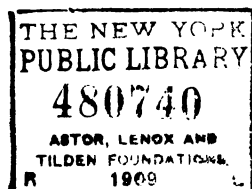


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TO
GEOFFREY AND RHODA
AND
THEIR MOTHER

[iii]

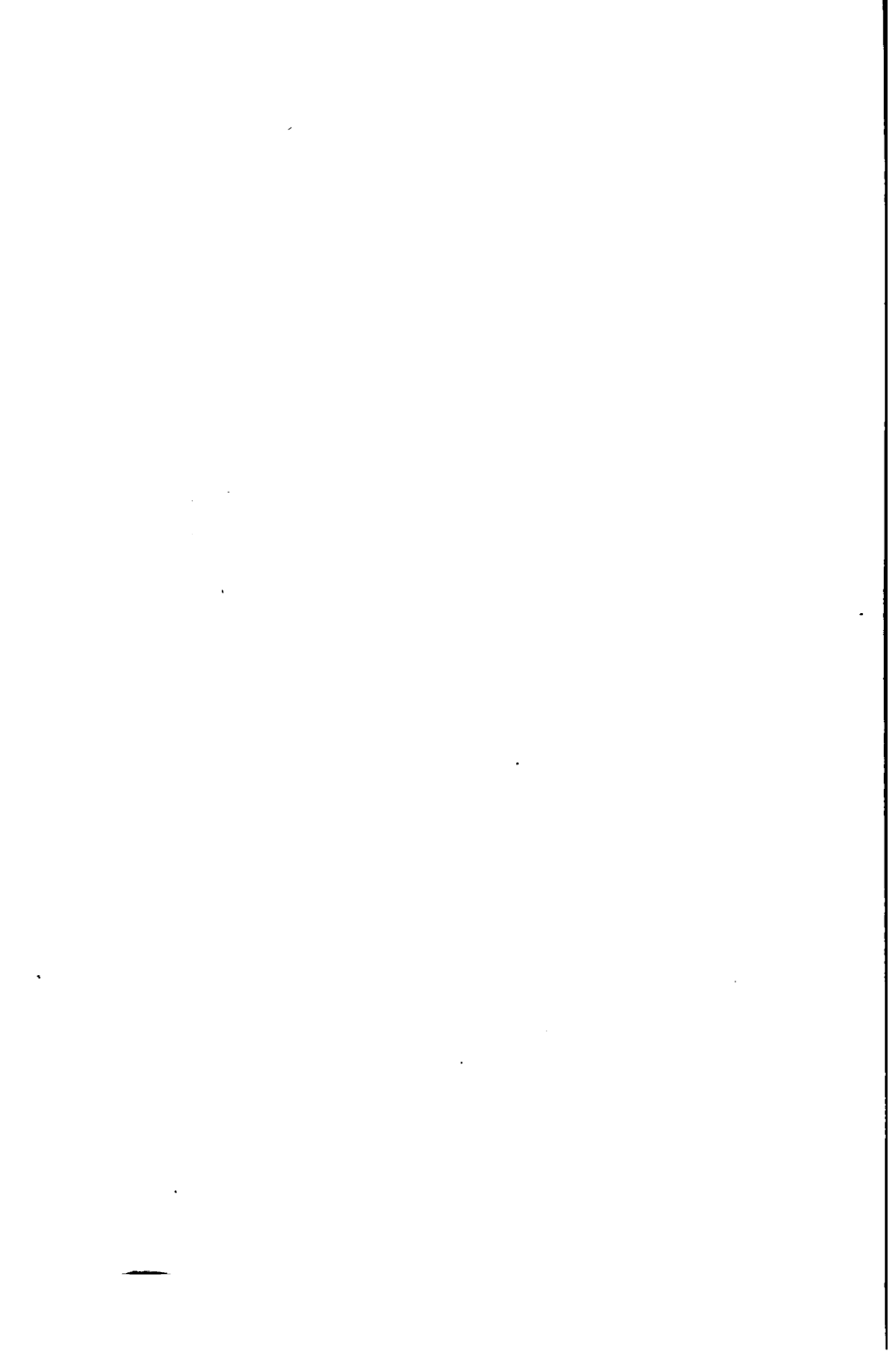
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THE HUDSON

WHERE in its old historic splendor stands
The home of England's far-famed Parliament,
And waters of the Thames in calm content
At England's fame flow slowly o'er their sands;
And where the Rhine past vine-entwinèd lands
Courses in castled beauty, there I went;
And far to southern rivers flower-besprent,
And to the icy streams of northern strands.

Then mine own native shores I trod once more,
And, gazing on thy waters' majesty,
The memory, O Hudson, came to me
Of one who went to seek the wide world o'er
For love; but found it not. Then home turned he
And saw his mother waiting at the door.

SONG

Do the mountains query
Whence our beauteous trees?
Do the waves make question
The glory of the seas?
Do the skies insist on
The stars' bright mystery?
Shall I seek to fathom
The love I bear to thee?

"DEAREST, WHEN THE WINDS OF SPRING"

DEAREST, when the winds of Spring
Kiss the buds to blossoming,
Well it is our hearts are gay,
Dancing like the lilac-spray.

Every year it blooms anew—
But *one* Spring for me and you.
Let us make the most of May:
Past, she comes no more our way.

MULTUM IN PARVO

THE sea-shell's faint-heard murmuring
Unto the poet's ear can bring
The rapture of the radiant sea
And all its glistening melody.

Borne by the north-wind's bitter breath
Unto its fragrant bed of death
This oak-leaf fluttering wan and sear
Is sentient with the dying year.

Within one dauntless far-flung word
The voice of myriads may be heard;
A woodland violet holds fast
The spirit of all springtimes past.

The thoughts that we eternal call—
A single life contains them all;
And joy and sorrow, hope and fear
Lie close impearled within a tear.

SYMPATHY

Ye all may join her laughter—
Partake her hours of bliss.
If sorrow follow after
Let me alone share this.

Yes, all of you may languish
When, joyous, she is fair.
Give me her tears of anguish
And silence of despair.

ON THE DEATH OF A LITTLE CHILD

PASSIONLESS ravisher of land and main,
Grim wielder of the Damocletian sword,
Thou stern negation stronger than the horde
Of towering warriors led by Tamerlane,
Thou overreacher of the craftiest brain
And final arbiter at every board,
O sole unconquerable and puissant lord,
Unmoved by pleasure and untouched by pain,—

Could'st thou not pass such easy conquest by;
Ay, raped all roses from the breast of earth,
And orisons of larks hushed in mid-sky,
And breathed oblivion o'er a city's mirth
To prove thy prowess? But this little child
Who trusting looked upon thy face and smiled!

SAN FRANCISCO

(April 18, 1906)

O FATEFUL dawn, destruction in thy train,
O fearful day when nature drew the key
That set the elemental furies free,
O night of death, come ye not thus again!
A little while ago and she did reign
The hill-throned Empress of the Western Sea—
Her sceptre now is fallen; misery
Her mantle, and her cruel crown is pain.

Ye strange Titanic forces past control,
Shall we bow down in fear, a weakling race?
Well can the earthquake from its buttressed place
A fortress hurl, but not the human soul;
And unto them who staunchly suffer, fate
Shall not avail to bar life's Golden Gate.

COLERIDGE

THINE is the mystic melody,
The far-off murmur of some dreamland sea
Lifting throughout the night,
Up to the moon's mild light,
Waves silver-lustrous, silvery-white,
That beat in rhythm on the shadowy shore,
And burst in music, and are seen no more.

LINES

GONE are the snows of yester-year,
Withered the rose that blossomed here,
And the heart is cold that once beat high.
Yet earth is more fair for last year's snows,
And sweeter the air where once bloomed the rose,
And dead hopes live in memory.

THE CONFESSIONAL

(THE WOMAN SPEAKS)

FATHER CONFESSOR, with weight of sin I come.
Bend nearer still thine ear compassionate.
Shame wellnigh seals my lips to leave them dumb,
Yet must I speak. Christ's tender love is great,
And He will save—if it be not too late.

Thou art aware what woman whispers here,
Her voice familiar through confessions heard;
Oft in her sorrow thou hast known to cheer;
And grateful is she for each flaming word
That her discouraged heart with courage stirred.

When last in deep perplexity she knelt,
"Be true unto thyself nor be afraid"—
Thus didst thou bless with counsel, and I felt
As one who pierces to a sunlit glade,
Beyond the tangled forest's doubtful shade.

My life hath been a sea without a shore,
And harborless my soul a drifting bark.
The winds of sorrow ever smote it more,
And I grew weak with striving, nor could mark
A single star to guide me through the dark.

He that should have been pilot of my soul
And found the haven of our joint delight,
Was all intent upon another goal:
My lordly husband, reckless of my plight,
Made night a desert for me, and day night.

Enamored of the soft caress of gold,
Impassioned by seductive lure of power,
How could o'er him my fading beauty hold
Its sovereignty of the bridal hour
Or win him back to love's deserted bower?

Unceasingly we drifted far apart,
Our ways divided by ambition's dream
Wherein was planned no place for my poor heart,
Though pearl-embroidered costumes he would scheme
To deck his puppet wife. Ah, it doth seem

A hideous paradox, satire, what you will,
That men should barter golden love for gloss,
And plot with cunning mind and strenuous will
To lose life's treasure in exchange for dross,
And all the while exultant in their loss

Had I but borne him children, then perchance
Life had not proved as fruitless as my womb.
They had increased his pride of circumstance
And, some day, carved his titles on his tomb:
But barren women must abide in gloom,

Unless, ah God, unless love's quenchless rays
Pour with redoubled light from lips and eyes;
In speech of comfort through desponding days,
And sympathy of silence when arise
Unuttered grief's unutterable cries.

I sorrowed without solace, and grew wild,
Till, roaming in imagination's hell
Wherein each mother strove to find her child,
(In vain, and I among them,) faint I fell,
Encircled by despair's relentless spell;

(All in a dream of anguish,) to awake
From a deep swoon of bliss-commingled pain,
And hear a blessed voice that said, "Forsake
The realms of bitter thoughts, nor tread again
The stones envenomed of a loveless lane."

Was it the whisper of a woodland bird
Warbling above in lyric-throated bliss,
Or symphony of seraphim, dim heard
Through struggling sleep? All that I know is this:
I woke from slumber, on my lips a kiss,

And o'er me gently bending was a form,
Whereat I leaped to life in sweet surprise;
As a poor mariner, wrestling with the storm,
Sees suddenly the coast where safety lies,
So fell my gaze upon thy love-lit eyes!

Nay, dearest of confessors, do not start!
Forbearing hear me till my story end.
I come not now to tempt thee with my heart
I wish no lover, but I need a friend,
Whom in His mercy may Lord Jesus send!

So to resume:—Long weeks my lonely mind
Had fed itself with visions of thy grace;
Mine unkind husband made thee still more kind.
Be it confessed, of late I sought this place
To still my yearning for thy loved face.

When first the truth confronted, I denied,
And named it Satan, and with passion strove
To drown the voice of love whene'er it cried,
Until at last I knew that far above
My poor opposing power rose my love.

The ramparts of my will in ruin lay
By the insidious victor overthrown.
Ah, glorious anguish of that happy day!
It seemed the sun with added radiance shone
When love triumphant came into his own.

Straightway in passionate words I bared my soul,
To honor heedless and to danger blind;
Then to thy sacristy at twilight stole
Softly as moonbeams, swiftly as the wind,
And left my words where none but thou should'st find.

Undoubting that my ardor would inflame
Even thy priestly heart, and by its power
Evoke like passion, fool, I dared to name,
The secret pathway, and the silent hour
When I should welcome thee within my bower.

So when last night the palpitating chimes
Announced the moment of expected bliss
(It seemed eternity till eleven times
The bells rang forth,) all life resolved to this:
Shall the world cease before I feel his kiss?

The echoes died away and, like a pall
Over a coffin, sombre silence fell.
Long stayed I crouching by the garden wall
But still thou cam'st not. Ah, what words can tell
The burning passion of a soul in hell?

At last, with weary footsteps, sad and slow,
Like pale-eyed sisters from their cloister came
The hours of dawn; I watched them come and go,
Until upon my misery and my shame
The rising sun relentless cast his flame.

Then went I to my chamber, hating thee,
Myself, mine husband, and all things that are.
I loathed earth's green, the blueness of the sea;
Insane I raged at sun and moon and star,
Wildly with all creation waging war;

Till from His crucifix upon my wall
With eyes of pity Lord Christ gazed on me—
With loving eyes that comprehended all—
Pity more boundless than the boundless sea,
And love more deep than my deep misery.

O holy mystery of the perfect God
Who for the sin of men was crucified
Suffering the Roman soldier's thornèd rod,
The spike of hatred in His quivering side,
Until, a deathless deity, He died!

Heart-broken still, yet with new strength of mind
I rose transformed by His compassionate gaze,
Resolved to seek submissive and to find
Some vestige of the faith of maiden days
Wherewith to guide my steps in duty's ways.

And as I knelt in prayer and sought for aid
Three thoughts like messengers from heaven sped,
Peace harbingers to me, and undismayed
To follow God's strong hand where'er it led,
I rose from kneeling by mine unslept bed.

To Him whose deeds all other works transcend
I thought how gratitude I best might show;
I thought how lovingless it were to blend
The shameful mire of my passions low
With thy priest's sanctity's undriven snow.

I thought how he my husband proudly gave
His honor to my guard, without commands,—
An ancient trust of heritage that brave
Dead men and women died for in far lands,
Bequeathing it unstained into my hands.

And now I come to claim the missive sent,
Mute witness of my momentary shame
(If yet thou hast not burnt it); to repent
The jeopardy wherein I placed thy fame
And mine own lineage's unspotted name;

And most of all to thank thee who didst save
Me from myself by purity's avail;
Who wouldst not grant the sin that I did crave,
Servant of God, to leave me rent and frail,
A miserable wreck by passion's gale.

So ends confession. I had asked more soon
My letter of thee, but I wished to tell
My piteous tale the whole, ere yet this boon,
Granted by thee, should token all is well
And I am saved by Lord Christ's miracle.

Thou draw'st it from thy sleeve. I mark my crest.
Thanks beyond words! I hear the angels sing!
Now I shall clasp forgiveness to my breast!
How thine hand trembles!—God, my husband's ring!
* * * * *
Well, serpent, I am ready for thy sting!

(THE MAN SPEAKS)

Thine husband's ring upon thine husband's hand,
Thine husband's hand that slew the traitor priest,
Whose soul flames forth in Hell, a noisome brand
Flourished by Satan laughing! So that beast
Stalks forth no more unto his carnal feast!

How I thy letter captured, let that be.
I tripped his heels with lustful fire shod
Swift to the meeting, by the lilac tree,
Our gateway's glory; and my sword, a rod,
Chastened the traitor's insolence to God.

His mummer's garb I stripped, myself to wear
The vestments of hypocrisy; to weigh
The sum of the affront I lived to bear;
Learn, as confessor, whether I should stay
The stroke of honor mine own wife to slay.

(THE WOMAN SPEAKS)

Lay bare the blade, and sheathe it in my breast!
No syllable of love do I deny.
Who weakly played his part now lies at rest;
But not so weakly playing, soon shall I.
I ask no pardon of thee. Let me die.

(THE MAN SPEAKS)

But I of thee ask pardon. Hadst thou heard,
My silent voice in this confessional hour!
Each breath I drew a deep repentant word,
Each thought a seed which thou mightst cause to flower
In deed of virtue by thy wifehood's power.

By mine own tyranny a shackled slave
Unto my meaner nature I have grown.
Whilst thou, escaping from the threatening wave
Fed by my streams of selfishness, alone
Can stamp the seeds of sin that I have sown.

He who forgot himself, forget thou him.
Thou hast escaped the charring of love's flame,
For, like the voice of holy seraphim
When God's own Son into His kingdom came,
I heard thee speak the honor of our name.

Be thou confessor; me, the penitent,
Absolve by pity, if not yet by love.
Impose whate'er thou wilt, I am content.
There is no obstacle but I will move
My newborn soul's sincerity to prove.

Promise me naught. But, infinite desire,
Rich guerdon of brave deeds, thy love again
May flame with light of its once wonted fire,
Sunrise and morning to me! So the pain
That, wildly foaming, floods my heart, shall wane.

Thou giv'st thine hand! Beating with reverence,
I take it before both my wish and fear
Of all his former trusts. Come, as a voice,
Hark to the herald voice of regeneration,
Proclaiming earth's new day and life's new year.

A CHALLENGE

THINK you to shatter these high rocks, O Sea,
That thus you strike in wrath?
The firm crag rising o'er you fearlessly
A truer splendor hath.

Think you to shatter man's high hopes, O Fate,
That thus you deal forth pain?
Know that alone the dauntless are the great.
Strike, if you will, again!

IN A STREET CAR

Put down your paper for a space
And let the evening's news go by;
Here in this swift-wheeled meeting place
The *living* pages open lie.
Your neighbor who doth closely scan
With hawk-like eye the day's finance
Betrays the avaricious man,
The insatiate votary of chance.

Beside him, conscious of her dress,
Its laces and its furbelows,
A girl with alien tenderness
Holds to her face a purer rose.
But you, with reverential gaze,
May mark the mystery of race
In yonder woman's careful ways
And pale, incipient mother's face;
Or pierce with sharp indignant look
Beneath the lofty vulgar stare
This awkward, ill-kempt workman took
In brushing 'gainst that millionaire.
Two children, the day's lessons done,
Chatter and laugh in boisterous wise;
Youth's unpremeditated fun
Is leaping in their sparkling eyes.
What know they of our elder care,
Of searèd heart, and furrowed brow?
Time is not yet when they must share
Knowledge of grief as we do now.

ON FINDING AN OLD LOCKET

ONCE searching at my leisure,
(The thing I sought was pleasure)
Amid an endless measure
Of trinkets worn and old,

I found a locket lying
Just where the sun's rays, dying,
Made possible my spying
The battered piece of gold.

A fair young face, a flower
Perchance from some dim bower
Where, in a long gone hour,
Love, youth, and life had reigned;

These, and some words intended
For one whose dust long blended
With other dust, life ended,
These only it contained.

Ah, sweet young maid, forever
Gone, where all high endeavor
Of brave and strong and clever
Meets with its end at last,

With love thine eyes are beaming
So that their love-light gleaming
Makes death itself seem seeming;
Thy life cannot be past!

And yet, the words' dim tracing
Show how the years, swift chasing,
Have sped, the all-erasing,
And prove thy life is o'er;

But what thine eyes betoken
Will be a charm unbroken,
Till the last word be spoken,
And mankind is no more.

LOQUITUR MORS

DEATH

BEHOLD me, face to face, you who have uttered
Unchallenged vaunts of unconcernèd soul,
Whose dauntless heart with fear hath never fluttered
Whatever shadows o'er life's pathway stole.
Tell me, my friend, is now your courage steady?

THE MAN

As this strong rock, whereby you lean your spear.
Day I have loved, but for the night am ready;
Open night's gate; I follow without fear.

DEATH

For you the sun hath for the last time risen,
Nor shall your sightless eyes behold it set.
No windows look from my eternal prison;
Starlight and moonlight have not reached it yet.
The golden foliage of the woodland places,
The glorious leapings of the unleashed sea,
Your lovèd mountains' kindly, rugged faces
For you have been, but never are to be.

The gentle budding of sweet verdant valleys
Thrilled by the herald note of Spring's first bird,
Where you have quaffed new strength from
Nature's chalice—
Irrevocably lost.

THE MAN

Yes, I am stirred,
Stirred to far depths, O Death, I will confess it,
Beauty was ever boundless balm to me.
Grief now is mine, yet how shall fear redress it,
Or from your vaults prove open sesame?
I bid my last farewell unto creation
Who well have fared amidst its sounds and sights,
Grateful for lordly moments of elation,
And draughts deep drunk of all its sweet delights.

DEATH

How of your mind that overleaped all spaces,
Unchecked by bar of time and orb of star,
Consorting with the gods in their high places,
Embracing visions of a world afar?
For winding worms and little loathsome lizards
Your skull shall prove a comfortable nest;
Your aspirations, like confounded wizards,
Shall vanish into naught at my behest.

Through endless æons no Promethean fire
Shall light anew your ever-blinded eyes;
All dreams of wisdom and all joy's desire
Dissolved to dust. How now?

THE MAN

He dies who dies.

DEATH

And yet no fear?

THE MAN

At what shall I be frightened?

In all that you have said I am well versed,
Thus neither overcast nor yet enlightened
By these stern truths your grim voice has rehearsed.
Try then no more. Contented with your power
Make ending to this parley. Take your dead.
Eternal time shall lack the final hour
To bring to you the tribute of my dread.

DEATH

One moment more. I grant you wisdom, beauty,
And all the pleasures clustering in their train,
Ambitious hopes, and high commands of duty—
Their memory I have invoked in vain.

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Still stand you dauntless, still his quest is bootless
Who, ere he breaks you, wills that you should bend;
A half-won triumph were a triumph fruitless.

THE MAN

I wait your blow.

DEATH

It comes. We near the end.

Bethink you of the fairest and the dearest
Whose love gave perfume to your flower of life;
Who, miles asunder, still your heart lay nearest,
And made divine the common name of wife.
No more her smiles, her kiss, her dear caresses;
No more the answering hand that in yours stole;
Sweet parted lips on lips, sun-kissèd tresses,
And pure communion of soul with soul.

THE MAN

O cruel Death!

DEATH

Say now, am I the master?
Confess to fear that you must go alone.
She who has shared each joy and each disaster
Finds blocked the journey by your burial stone.

THE MAN

O cruel Death, your words a path of anguish
Cleave through my loving longing heart anew.
Let me no further in my misery languish.
'T is love o'erwhelms me. Not the fear of you.

DEATH

Your valor likes me. Many a laurelled hero,
Victors of cities, winners of world fame,
The Macedonian Philip, Roman Nero,
Showed not more courage when they heard my name.
But though you do not quail at the decision
Which doth decree the riving from your love,
Conjure, my friend, this not all-pleasing vision:
When you lie dead below, and she above
Treads all unguarded through life's darkening places
Until she nears me at the road's drear end,
Bereft of strength from loved familiar faces;
I leer upon her; close my features bend;
She calls upon you, but your voice is silent—
She gropes for your warm hand, but it is dust. . . .

(The man leaps forward and seizes the spear of Death)

DEATH

Presumptuous man, would you with Death be violent?

None knows but I the secret of that thrust.

(The man falls back dead)

DEATH

(Bending over him)

The fatal touch of my all-fateful spear!

And yet I know not if I taught him fear.

ARTHUR TRENT

A CURIOUS man was Arthur Trent;
His neighbors called him taciturn;
By all the villagers' consent
Unheeded quite he came and went;
Their ways a livelihood to earn
With smiling calm he seemed to spurn.
'T was natural that they should resent
The silent insolence of Trent.

One morn they found him in his bed,
A lovely smile upon his face.
"Well, the poor vagabond is dead,
'T is not much loss. God grant him grace."
Then, for the day was somewhat sped,
Each hurried to his working place.

But when the village children heard
That shiftless Arthur Trent had died
All little hearts were strangely stirred,
And parents wondered why they cried.

And as each child, so every bird
That fluttered near the village square
Seemed waiting for the absent word
To lure them through the lazy air.

And one that lived a life apart—
Anathema upon her name—
Who felt his sympathetic heart
O'erleap the barriers of her shame,
The bitter blast of wintry snows
Still ventures, wreath in hand, to brave;
And every summer day a rose
She gently places on his grave.

LULLABY

CLOUDS are ships that sail on high
Across the blue sea of the sky;

Sleep, dear baby, sleep.

Every cloud that rides the gale
Hides an angel 'neath its sail,
And the little angels keep
Guard above you as you sleep,
Sleep, dear baby, sleep.

When the veils of night arise
And dim the little angels' eyes,

Sleep, dear baby, sleep;

Still your mother is at hand
While you roam in slumberland.
Deeper than the sea is deep,
Her love guards you as you sleep,
Sleep, dear baby, sleep

TO A LITTLE CHILD

THOUGH they grant me fame whose measure
Shall stretch from deathless birth,
Though they give me gold and treasure
Voiding the mines of earth,
They can not give me such pleasure
As you with your loving mirth.

No, they have not the power
To yield deep joy like this,
That bids faith once more tower
O'er doubt's forlorn abyss,
And makes the whole world flower
In a child's spontaneous kiss.

WORDSWORTH

LONG, Wordsworth, have I missed thy beauty, long
Have looked on all thy verse as barren prose
Where Morals and Philosophy arose
To prate of truth and wisdom, right and wrong.
Melodious music, lyric burst of song—
The gladsome offspring of the poet's throes—
I found them not, but went as one who goes
Blinded by light unseen because too strong.

The light which erstwhile dazzled now grows clear:
Philosopher and poet are akin:
Both look without on nature and within
On man; nor is the gaze in aught austere.
He whosoe'er will seek at last shall find
The throbbing heart beneath the sentient mind.

THE JEST

A room in the palace. In one corner a DUKE, several lords and ladies are talking gaily. On a sofa the KING is reclining, lazily stroking a spaniel. Standing near by is the JESTER, deep in thought. Every now and then he looks up, with a strange expression in his eyes, at the DUKE in the further corner.

THE KING (*yawning*): May good Saint Louis
Curse this storm which so has spoilt our hunt,
For I am weary grown of doing naught!

[*Perceives the JESTER.*

Ho, ho! What 's this? My merry laughing Jacques,
So deep in thought! What is there in your mind?
Some plan wherewith to while away the time
That hangs so heavy on these fair white hands?

[*The KING holds up his hands, and looks at them languorously.*

THE JESTER:

Nor of your hands, nor of yourself, thought I.
My mind, O King, was bent on serious things;
Your place is not with them.

THE KING (*half frowning*): Forget not, Fool,
The salt of wit makes us athirst for more,
But it mislikes us when there 's pepper in 't.

THE DUKE:

The Fool is growing impudent of late.
Full oft I've noted it, my liege. 'Tis that
You pamper him too much.

THE KING: My lord the Duke
Presumes too far to criticize the King.

[The KING breaks into a laugh.]

My faith! good sirs, let's change our mood, and smile
For King and Lord and Fool, all three of us,
Have let the surly thunder turn us sour
E'en like a bowl of milk. Come, Jacques, a jest
To drive away the clouds of our ill mirth.

THE JESTER (*smiling curiously*):

A jest, my liege the King?

THE KING: Said I not so, a jest.

THE JESTER (*turning to the DUKE, with the same smile*):

A jest, my lord the Duke?

THE DUKE: Why, yes, a jest.

THE KING:

But why asked you the Duke? It should suffice
That I the bidding made.

THE JESTER:

An't please, my liege,

'T was but the introduction to my jest.

[The other lords and ladies come nearer, and the JESTER begins:

There lived in France a mighty Duke who here
Shall nameless be—the tale remains the same,—
And in his wide domain where ran a brook
That like a drunken man swerved in its course
Until it tumbled o'er some slippery stones
And fell, there stood a house—the lodge.
Without its walls in summer, roses bloomed;
Within, there dwelt a maiden all year through—
The daughter of the keeper of the game.
She was as highly bred as lowly born,
And good as fair, and beautiful as pure.

THE DUKE (*sarcastically*):

The Fool turns poet.

THE JESTER:

The Duke turns pale. Is it to match my mood,
Since poesy and pallor, people say,
So often dwell together?

[*The DUKE flushes, but does not answer, and the JESTER continues:*

Elise la bien-aimée,
Her neighbors called her. Ay, and well beloved
Was she of all who knew her. But beloved
The best of a poor jester whom Elise
Had, on a winter's night, found at her door;
By cold indifference and the stormy winds
He had been driven thither hunger-mad,

But not for bread. It was his soul that craved,
And human kindness was the food it sought.
Elise, compassion-prompted, bade him come
And be a welcome guest within her home
Whene'er he listed thus to spend an hour. . . .
The Duke, methinks, grows weary of the tale,
So I will tell as briefly as I may,
How first a sense of pity made Elise
Be kind to the poor jester; and how then
The bond grew stronger till it changed to love
On her part, as on his.

THE DUKE:

I thought, my liege, we were to hear a jest,
And not the maudlin tale of some fool's love.

THE JESTER:

If but the Duke will listen to my tale
Until it end, he will not miss the point.
(*Aside.*) Nor it, by heaven, him!

[*Continues:*

The neighbors said: "Thou errest, Bien-aimée.
Thou shouldst have other lover than a fool."
Then she would smile and answer: "Ah, but love
Cares not for wisdom, nor for looks nor wealth.
For it is wiser than all wisdom is;
More beautiful than beauty's self; more rich
Than all the kings than ever reigned in France."

[40]

[*The JESTER pauses; then continues:*

It chanced, some weeks before the wedding-time,
The lord of all the lands stopped at the lodge.
He saw Elise and thought no more that day
Of hunting stag or boar; for here in truth
Was nobler game more worthy to be trapped.
So when the jester reached that night the lodge
He found Elise in tears. "Ah, dear," spake she,
"His Grace the Duke has passed this way to-day;
He has seen fit to speak of love to me.
He begged me share his power, lands, and wealth,
And yet he begged me not to share his name;
So that I knew it was not love he spoke,
Since love shares all and, with unstinted hand,
Grows richer in the giving. Yet, what if
His Grace the Duke doth feel some love for me.
I care not for it, but for yours alone,
For yours, for yours!" She wildly threw her arms
Around the jester who throughout the speech
Stood rooted to the spot like one who sees
The walls of Fate, the Grand Inquisitor,
Close slowly in upon his happiness.
But when Elise had ceased to speak, a cry
Burst from the jester's lips, and he did swear
That neither God above nor Duke below
Should come between his love and him.—But why,

My lords and ladies, shrink you back? Perchance
I tell the tale too well and make it seem
Too realistic for such dainty ears.
If so, then pardon me, wait but a while
And you shall hear the jest whereof I spoke.
The fool allowed the torrent of his words
Full flow, until Elise smiled at his wrath,
The sad, sweet smile of pitying love, and said:
"Peace, dear beloved. Go you to the Duke,
And plead your cause and mine. It may avail;
For when I tried he almost yielded once,
Ay, would have yielded, had his gaze not lit
Upon the cursèd beauty of my face
As I knelt there before him. But to you
The Duke may listen with a kindlier ear.
If you succeed, why then, we 'll live and love;
And if you fail, this dagger"—here she plucked
From out his belt the jester's jewelled blade—
"Shall argue well my cause before the Duke.
For I am yours, and ever will be yours,
And only yours." She kissed him tenderly.
"Go now. God speed you, dear."

*[The storm meanwhile has ceased, and the sun at this point
breaks forth gloriously from behind some clouds.]*

A COURTIER (*interrupting*):

Why see, the storm is over, and the skies

Are turning blue. We yet shall have our hunt!

THE DUKE (*to a lady*):

Let us go forth. The tale is tedious grown.

The point 's too long in coming.

THE JESTER (*barring the passage*):

Wait, my lord!

I bid you wait!

THE DUKE (*angrily*):

What mean you by this, Fool?

I brook no insolence.

THE KING:

Oh, humor him,

That we may sooner hear the jest, my lord.

[*The DUKE bows, and remains standing near the door. The*

JESTER then continues the tale.

THE JESTER:

The meanest coward turns at love's behest

Into a hero, and the poorest fool

Becomes a sage. And so, with flaming heart

And cunning mind, he went to seek the Duke.

Amid his followers, gathered round the board

That groaned beneath the weight of wine and meat,

He found him, loud in song. The music ceased

Upon the entrance of the fool, for straight

The Duke divined his errand, and bade fall

Silence! upon the drunken revellers.

"You come, O fool," said he, "propitiously,

For we have sung the songs of wench and wine
Till our poor lungs pant piteously for rest."
The jester answered, thrusting down his fear:
"My lord, I come with no new tale to tell,
But with a boon to crave. You know Elise—"
"Ay, well he does," broke in a wine-soaked wag,
"And he will know her better, swear to that!"—
Unmindful of the laugh that roared around,
The fool spake on: "I love her, my lord Duke,
As only he can love who has naught else
In all the world beside. Have mercy, Duke!
Say that you will, and my whole life is yours,
My fealty and heart's devotion all.
You who have but to speak, and all of France
Brings forth her noblest maidens for your choice,
Will surely spare this one so lowly-born
Who is the total of my happiness,
And who loves me as I, my lord, love her.
What would you gain did you deny our plea?
A flower without fragrance; ay, a star
Wherefrom the light is fled, and there remains
Naught but the soulless body, cold, forlorn.
For such is maiden, man, or god, or beast,
Yoked by a bond whose strength lies in aught else
Than that which love commands. And therefore, Duke,
Grant this my prayer, and leave Elise to me."

[*The courtiers and ladies listen intently, for there is a passionate tone in the words of the JESTER as he recounts the tale. The KING looks quizzically at the DUKE, who is still standing near the door, and then turns to the JESTER.*

THE KING (*smiling*):

The feeling, Jacques, you put into these words
Would, by my faith! near warrant the belief
They are your own. But come, what said the Duke,
How answered he the fool's request?

THE JESTER:

Sire, thus:

He waited first until the revellers' mirth
Had grown less boisterous, and then he spoke.
"Why laugh you, friends?" said he. "Is it so strange
That what the fool desires he should seek?
Or is the well-spring of your mirth stirred up
By the mere thought that he my rival is?
A fool 's a man, a fool has rights, my friends,
E'en though a duke should challenge them. Think
you

The jingle of the bells upon his cap
Sounds in the ear of God less musical
Than tinkle of the crystal goblets here
Raised high by trembling hands of drunken lords?"
Then turned he from the revellers to the fool
And said: "Elise is yours. I give her not,
For she has given herself. Go say to her

That Dukes of France look not on woman's love
Or honor as a thing to traffic in,
And e'en a fool has rights."

[*The JESTER ceases abruptly, and slowly looks around the room. The ladies shrink back as their gaze meets his. The courtiers look with astonishment at each other. The DUKE, still standing near the door, changes color as the recital ends, and a puzzled expression comes over his face.*

THE JESTER (*with a sudden outburst of passion*):

Why laugh you not, ye lords and ladies all,
And you, O King, where is your sense of mirth?
Have you not heard the jest? Is it not good?
Ye noblemen whose ruthless lust has sent
Once honored men into dishonored graves,
And changed once happy homes to breeding-place
Of curses and despair,—does not the thought
That e'er a Duke of France should honor love
And love a woman's honor, though it be
A peasant maiden's, reaping in the fields—
Does not the thought arouse your mirth, my lords?
And what of this: that e'en a fool has rights,
Though they be challenged by the peers of France?
Is this not cause for laughter?

THE DUKE (*interrupting*):

The Fool is mad.

THE JESTER:

Ay, mad, indeed, and to such great extent
That e'en a ravening dog would envy me,
Had he a foe to bite. But you, good Duke,
Must surely see the humor of my jest.

[He slowly goes nearer the DUKE.]

Explain it to the ladies, who, it seems,
Shake now with fear, stead laughter.

[He goes still nearer.]

This boon, the *second* that I crave of thee,
Will be the last, good Duke.

[The JESTER goes still nearer. The DUKE divines his purpose, and draws his sword just as the JESTER leaps at him with dagger uplifted. The drawn sword pierces his breast, and he falls to the ground dying. There is a great commotion among the ladies and the courtiers.]

THE DUKE (*turning to the King*):

He forced me to it, Sire, in self-defence.

THE JESTER (*in a voice scarcely audible*):

Had it but reached his heart!

It was the very dagger that she used

To save her honor when she slew herself.

Fear for her father's welfare held her hand,

Or she had slain him too. . . .

Ah! wait . . . Elise . . . my love . . . soon we
shall meet

Where none can come between . . . and e'en . . .
a fool . . .

Has rights. . . . (*He dies.*)

[*The KING points to the door, and all leave the room, excepting the DUKE, who waits in silence for the KING to speak.*]

THE KING:

The blow you struck, Duke, was in self-defence;
You therefore lay the blame upon the Fool.
'T is true. The deed is done. And there 's an end.
But what of her who also struck a blow,
Against herself in self-defence 'gainst you?
Where shall the blame be laid?

[*The DUKE remains silent, and the KING continues:*]

In truth, my lord,
I loved the Jester whom so foully you
Have wronged, and now if I should bid you go
In exile to atone your black misdeed,
Should you have aught to say?

THE DUKE: Not aught, my liege.

When you did send the Count of Chartres away
Upon some dangerous journey to the East,
Because, poor man, his wife was beautiful,
Did he have aught to say? No more have I.

[*The KING flushes, and then grows thoughtful. After a few moments of silence he speaks.*]

THE KING:

Yes, you are right;
'T is not for me to judge. I too have sinned.
And gone unpunished. But heard you the words
Formed by the dying lips of this poor Fool?
Perchance there is a place where just deserts
Shall be dealt out by some all-righteous Judge.
To *His* grace I commend you, my lord Duke.
Now go!

[*The DUKE bows, and withdraws. The KING stands long beside the body of the JESTER, deep in thought. The spaniel all the while is affectionately licking the face of the FOOL. Now and then the animal whines. At last the KING's reverie is interrupted by the entrance of an attendant.*

THE ATTENDANT (*without perceiving the corpse*):

The hounds await your pleasure, Sire.

[*The KING does not seem to hear him.*

THE ATTENDANT (*after waiting a moment*):

Your steed is at the gate, my liege.

THE KING:

I go not to the hunt to-day.

[*The attendant bows, and withdraws. The curtain falls.*]

IMMANUEL KANT

SMALL of stature—five feet tall
Never over strong in health;
Plain professor—that is all—
Never title—never wealth—
Never love of child or wife—
Thus he lived throughout his life.

Königsberg, the little town—
Was the village of his birth;
Königsberg saw him go down
In sweet death to Mother Earth—
(Ne'er he travelled, so they say,
More than sixty miles away.)

Königsberg, how true thy name!
Ay, the Mountain of the King,
With the crown of deathless fame
Such as gold can never bring.
For he gathered from man's world
Rarest gems of truth empearled.

Master of the realm of thought—

Well the limits have you found
Of man's wisdom. It is naught

Bounded by the infinite round;
For his reason, by its laws,
Cannot fathom End or Cause.

Servant of the moral will,

Well you show the lofty height
Toward which men may follow still,

Ever gaining purer light,
Ever rising from the sod,
Ever reaching nearer God.

Not the outcome of man's deeds,

But the intent of his act—
This indeed the creed of creeds:
Will the right,—and if the fact
Be a worldly failure, then
Will the right, and act again!

At the power of your brain

Systems of tradition fell:
Men invoked the curse of Cain,
Calling you the son of Hell,
For they saw not that you led
To the Living through the Dead.

At the power of your heart
Structures of great faith arose.
Though their beams shall fall apart,
Covered by the future snows,
This their essence naught may kill:
Man is master of his will.

Poor, untitled, weak, and small,
Lacking woman's wonder-love,
Yet you found the Heart of All—
Yet you reached the heights above—
Making man's True Self your chant:
This your fame, Immanuel Kant!

A WOMAN

SHE was as fair as the dawn of the day,
Splendid as pearls in the depths of the sea.
"What shall I bring that at last I may say,
Your love is for me?"

Brought her his love,—but she questioned its worth;
Yielded his honor,—she turned in disdain.
"Gift of my life may move you to mirth!"
She smiled at him slain.

Plucked a white rose that lay on her breast
Whiter than whitest of roses in May;
Crimsoned the blossom in blood; with a jest
Went forth on her way.

THE CHILDREN IN THE FACTORIES

How do you feed your furnaces, brother?

What fuel is in your fires?

Coal and wood

Are my furnaces' food:

With them I feed my fires.

But why do you turn away your face?

An honest living is no disgrace,

And I must feed my fires.

How are your wheels kept swiftly turning?

What glistens upon your wheels?

Oil in great store

My workmen pour

Upon the circling wheels.

But why that loathing in your eye?

Success itself doth justify,

And I must oil my wheels.

*What do you sell in the market-places,
Wherefor they give you gold?
Shining glass
And cotton in mass
I sell for glittering gold.
But why that curse upon your lips?
Can aught on earth my gold eclipse,
My best-belovèd gold?*

*With lives of little children
Your flaming fires you feed.
With blood of helpless children
Your circling wheels gain speed;
And souls of stunted children
You barter in your greed.*

THE SPHINX

No need of Egypt, for man's mind
Is wider than all countries are;
It soars above the highest wind
And consorts with the furthest star;
It strives against the bars of space
And knocks upon the gates of Time,
Running a never ending race—
Unto a goal sublime?

No need of Egypt, for man's heart
Beats even with the wings of years
And plays its never changing part
Of sunshine, sorrow, joys, and tears.
Unaltered are the quest and strife;
Old passions breathe we at each breath;
Still at the heels of every life
With dogged footsteps follows Death.

The keenest wind, the brightest star,
The deepest love, the purest hope
Avail not yet to all unbar
The gate of darkness where we grope,
Are we but as the dust that flies,
And men the mates to meaner things?
The mystery still unravelled lies
A skein of strangely blended strings.

*No need of Egypt for, methinks,
At every hearthstone sits the Sphinx.*

THE LYRIC OF LIFE AND LOVE

In an ancient wood a castle stood, its walls were heaven-high,
Its moat so deep that the realms of sleep would shallow seem thereby;
And ever a sound wandered around, and lost itself in the sky.

Was it the breeze in the hemlock trees, sighing for other days?
Was it the strain of souls in pain, wailing their evil ways?
It was the prayer of a maiden fair, meshed in magic maze.

In answer to her the sorcerer had said: "You shall be free
As the birds above, when of Life and Love a true lyric you sing to me;
Nor until then tho' gods and men should beg on bended knee."

A heavy fold of hair of gold o'er either shoulder flung,
Her eyes on fire, she grasped the lyre, that to her fingers
clung;
Her voice was sweet as larks that greet the morn, and thus
she sung:

*Life is a lily
With bells of joy;
Love is its music
Without alloy.
Pure is the lily,
Dream-fair is love;
Earth is my witness,
And heaven above.*

The last sweet tone had hardly flown to the realm of
silenced song
When, his heart astir, the sorcerer recalled old passions
strong,
And he bowed his head in grief, and said: "You have read
the riddle wrong."

Again she strove to sing of love, again of life to sing,
But e'er the same the answer came: "This is not truth
you bring."
And the long years fled till hope lay dead, slain by much
sorrowing.

He was not real, her soul's ideal, the lover of her dream,
Who, true and brave, should come to save her in her need
supreme,
On his fair face God's holy grace, and in his eyes love's
gleam.

And so, at last, when youth had passed, she cried: "I have
it now."

Hark to me well, thou son of Hell, O sorcerer dark of
brow,
And set me free from witchery. This is thy song, I
trow:

*Life is a cypress,
Servant of death;
Love is but seeming,
Fleeting as breath.
Dark is the cypress,
Dream false is love;
Earth is my witness,
And heaven above.*

The drear song died on the even-tide that bore it far
away,
But the spell of doom lay in its gloom, and could not choose
but stay.
"Say, have I wrought the thing you sought?" And the
other answered, "Nay."

The bitter tears of passionate years gave way to calmer
thought,
Until, at length, a greater strength than angry grief was
brought
To teach the truth that age to youth eternally has
taught.

Through prison bars alone the stars had cast on her their
light;
Words of the wise her only eyes whereby with others'
sight
Man's world she saw of strife and law, of evil and of
right,

Save that for her, interpreter remained her living soul
That wandered far from star to star, that reached life's
every goal,
Lived in all men, and in its ken comprised life's truth, the
whole.

Ah, she was old, the hair of gold long since had turned to
grey,
The glorious sunrise in her eyes gone with a far past day,
Yet not alone grief's sombre tone her strong, brave voice
did sway:

*Life is a rose that discloses
Beauty which no man supposes
Hidden within;
Love is the fragrance so tender
That in our hearts doth engender
Hatred of sin;
Sin is the worm that despoileth
The canker that cruelly soileth,
Yet cannot kill all.
Sorrow 's the sister of Duty
Adding to Summer's beauty
The pathos of Fall.*

*Leaves of the rose must be going;
Eternally Time's winds are blowing,
Yet will endure
The seed of the blossom forever,
The fragrance that Death cannot sever
From hearts that are pure.
Joy-begot spirit that seeth
Clearly, and fearlessly freeth
Man from Sin's strife.
Teach us all, chastened by Sorrow,
Bravely to face the last morrow
O Love in Life!*

"May ill betide!" the sorcerer cried. "Thus to my spell
a close.

This darkened hall to ruin must fall at the lyric of the rose,
And you are free as each must be who life's deep truths once
knows."

With his black wand he touched her hand, then vanished
in eclipse.

There was the sound of crashing ground, the roar of battling
ships.

* * * * *

At last, free, free! In death lay she, a smile upon her lips.

MOUNTAIN VERSES

PEACE in the wooded stillness of the night,
And in the murmur of the waters, peace.
The world's hot heart in wonder seems to cease
From beating, lulled by far-off starry light.

Lake, forest, fish that swims and bird that flies,
Wild beast, perchance that on the morrow dies,—
Peace rests on all.
Yet is there unrest in my inmost soul—
A nameless yearning for an unknown goal,
A low, insistent call.

A DIFFERENCE

A WORKMAN, by despair made wild,
His stunted mind of sense bereft,
Filches a coin. Dear sirs, his child
Is starving!—Granted. Theft is theft.
The vaunted laws of a great nation
Cannot excuse such desperation.

Secure behind his walls of gold
The wealth of myriads this man plunders,
By vastness of his schemes made bold;
Nor reck's the sound of distant thunders.
His followers with contented glance
Review his action as finance.

LAUNCELOT

"Give me God-speed, great King," he said;
"Forth through the land I go
Nor come till wrong be banishèd
And cruel knights laid low;
Nor come till all be punishèd
Who wrought a woman's woe."

Then Arthur spake, "Behold I place
My hands in blessing on thy sword.
Give me sweet leave to kiss thy face;
God ever grant thee every grace,
Most dear and valiant lord."

No farewell word spake Guenevere.
She looked on him a little while;
She spake no parting word of cheer
But smiled a curious smile.
O fraught with woe past all surmise
The kiss she gave him with her eyes!
O fraught with hope of burning bliss
That first and fateful silent kiss!

The blood ran cold, the blood ran hot
Throughout the veins of Launcelot;
He looked once more upon the Queen
Who lovely sate with downcast mien.

He lifted high his trembling sword
In last salute unto his lord;
Then to his men he gave the call,
And, with a great heart, clove in twain
By loving passion, loyal pain,
Sir Launcelot left the hall.

TO EDMUND CLARENCE STEDMAN

(April 5, 1901)

To all the laurels that you wear
 We will not add a leaf of fame,
Or crown your oft-encrownèd hair
 With diadem of lofty name.
Let others wreathe you with the bays
 That shall be yours until the end;
We come not here to-night to praise:
 We pass the evening with our friend.

Men's genius may be found in marts;
 They give unto the world their brains;
They will not wholly give their hearts
 But hide a spot where Friendship reigns,
And keep it sacred from strange eyes
 And from the outer world defend.
Earth has not lost all Paradise.
 We pass the evening with our friend.

Thy Paradise wilt thou unbar
And let us rest with thee awhile?
We know how fair the Spirits are
That in thy heart's most sacred aisle
Have found a place since early days,
And what sweet grace their thoughts must lend;
We, too, would tread the favored ways:—
We pass the evening with our friend.

Ah, see, how rich the foliage is!
How warm the sunshine of thy smile!
How pure the air; whilst memories
Of youth make thee a youth awhile;
And though thy hair be silvered snow
With confidence do we contend
Not age did this: 't is merely so
To match thy heart and soul, O Friend!

EVENING ON THE MOUNTAIN LAKE

I

IN languid curves the ripples spread
And end in whispers on the shore;
The hawk slow circles overhead,
His day of hunting o'er;
The Sun hath kissed the West good-night;
Immortal lover! Kisses rare!
Each day they bring a new delight
And leave fresh blushes there.

O frail and clear mysterious gleam
Trembling from on high,
Are you alone that which you seem,
Pale princess of the sky?
Thoughts you inspire of wider scope
Than all the heavens are,
And dim desires and deathless hope,
O evening star.

Swift hurtling through the yielding brush
His branching antlers back,
More swiftly than the startled thrush
That flies athwart his track,
Unto his verdant meal the deer,
Lord of the woodland, leaps,
To browse where on the waters clear
The fragrant lily sleeps.

II

Weary am I of man's ways,
The failures we name success—
Our crowns and laurels and bays
That hide much emptiness;
For we bind the soul's freedom with thongs,
With honor we compromise,
Nor grant that all wrongs are wrongs
And that all lies are lies.

The trees do not barter for gain,
And rich though the harvest grows
Its gold shall not win for the grain
An obsequious bow from the rose.

The caress of the soft-lipped breeze
And the blast of the loud-mouthed gale
Are impartial to tallest of trees
And frailest of blossoms frail.

You say: "O dreamer most blind
Yourself will you sweetly thus cheat?
Is the hawk to the sparrow kind?
Has the serpent forgotten deceit?
Row forth to the furthestmost shore
And yet shall your vision be vain;
These woods have seen carnage before,
These waters shall know it again."

Have your way and your say; but O soon
Come thou, my love, unto me,
And silent let us commune
With all eternity.
Short is our day. It must cease
And death is never afar.
Here in a beautiful world of peace
Shineth the evening star!

THE DEATH OF LORENZO

(Careggi, 1492)

AN ATTENDANT

(Opening the door and ushering in Savonarola)

The prior of St. Mark's—

[The ATTENDANT withdraws]

LORENZO

Is very welcome.

I feared you might not come to me at all,

Or until time and I had parted ways.

Death is impatient, Fra Girolamo,

And beckons to me with his bony hand.

I would confess, and have you shrive my soul.

SAVONAROLA

Are there no other priests in Italy?

LORENZO

Not one less gracious.

SAVONAROLA

Wherefore, then, call me?

LORENZO

Nor one more honest, though he be my foe.

SAVONAROLA

Your praise, I fear, outruns your memory,
For recollection tells me 't is no year
Since, at your bidding, Mariano strove
To overwhelm me with his thunderbolts
Of calumny and lies. His pulpit rang
With accusations of so vile a kind
He had not dared unless by your command.
Let him be your confessor.

LORENZO

Nay, my friend,
We will not speak of things a year ago;
For then I feared alone one man in Florence,—
Savonarola; now I fear but God.

SAVONAROLA

Savonarola is the voice of God.
'T is He who chose me prior of St. Mark's
Not you, Lorenzo; He who bids my gaze

Pierce through the veils of dim futurity,
The Lord of all the world. He is my master.
I owe no homage to the lord of Florence.

LORENZO

None asks he of you now. A dying man
Finds all too great the burden of his sins.
Help you to lighten it.

SAVONAROLA

Well, be it so;
But only if you grant all I require;
Else to your death unshriven go by me.

LORENZO

What will you have?

SAVONAROLA

O cautious Medici,
You promise naught beforehand.

LORENZO

For I fear
The reaching mind of Fra Girolamo.

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SAVONAROLA

Three things do I exact. First, that you vow
Full faith in God's great mercy; without this
I have no power to shrive you of your sins.

LORENZO

With heart submissive, and with penitence
I do confess my utmost faith in Him
Whom you and I name Master.

SAVONAROLA

Oh, how swift
And easily this meek response rushed forth.
How many a lie, with no less speed, has leaped
Destructive from your lips!

LORENZO

You have no right
To doubt my soul's sincerity in this.
The vow of faith I make to God, not you.
Let Him be judge of it. He will requite.

SAVONAROLA

He will requite! Oh, that the folk of Florence
But knew the meaning of those syllables!

LORENZO

Your second requisition, prior?

SAVONAROLA

Is this:

All that you have unjustly gained, restore!

LORENZO

More have I given from my private purse
Than taken from mine enemies o'erthrown.

SAVONAROLA

Have I impugned your generosity?
Not so, Lorenzo, but I bid you make
Redress for tyranny exceeding it.
Volterra's pillaging leaps to my mind,
A ruthless act that stripped a city bare.
God will remember it, if you forget.
And when the hated Pazzi were cast down,
Theft stalked abroad beneath your willing gaze;
Nor do I know how often, or how much
In times of need, the treasury of Florence
Hath to Lorenzo at Lorenzo's word
Given submissive. Restore, restore, restore!
God keeps accounts, and, mark me, He will know
If but a single coin you now withhold.

LORENZO

Beneath my pillow you will find two keys.
I have not strength to reach them. Treasured vaults
Spring open at their touch, revealing gold
In serried ranks of calm omnipotence—
My armies that have won my victories,
Ruling the hearts of princes and of mobs.
Compute as best you can what I may owe
In restitution: double then your guess,
And trebly take the sum that you have reached.—
God shall not think "A merchant deals with me."

SAVONAROLA

I come then to my third request.

LORENZO

It is?

SAVONAROLA

That you give back her liberty to Florence.

LORENZO

How mean you, Fra Girolamo? Have not
The citizens their vote in this republic,
Wherewith to guide the reins of government?

SAVONAROLA

O crafty quibbler, at the gates of death
Still do you strive to throw your loaded dice?
Florence is no republic, save in name;
Hiding the abject soul of slavery
Beneath the garb of freedom. You alone,
Who rule with sinuous hand her destiny,
Can raise the crouching city from her shame.

LORENZO

What will you have?

SAVONAROLA

Proclaim the Medici
Henceforth but citizens as others are.
Decree that after you have bowed to death
Our dearest city shall not lie supine
Beneath the feet of Pietro, your son,
To be his footstool, as she has been yours.
Give back her liberty to Florence!

LORENZO

Priest,
Hath not our city,—whom I also love,
Not less than you, believe me,—greatly grown

In learning and in splendor and in power
Beneath the guidance of the Medici?

SAVONAROLA

O galleries of paintings and rare art,
O gardens that are Edens to the eye,
Academies where ancient culture dwells,
Ye, have the Medici to Florence given.
O minds that are serene in wisdom's light,
O hearts that from corruption still are pure,
O souls that turn with reverence to God,
Ye, have the Medici from Florence taken.
Once more, Lorenzo, is it yes, or no?

LORENZO

You bade me largely from my coffers take
And did I not most lavishly assent?

SAVONAROLA

How shall your gold avail you in the grave?

LORENZO

But now you bid me of mine honor give,
And slay the fame that else outlives my death.

SAVONAROLA

Give back her liberty to Florence!

[80]

LORENZO

Hear,

O Cosimo de Medici, this monk
Would have me tarnish your illustrious name,
And all the glory of our family!

SAVONAROLA

Now is the end, Lorenzo. Shall I shrive
Or leave accursed your sin-encircled soul?
Give back her liberty to Florence!

[LORENZO turns his face to the wall. After some moments of silence SAVONAROLA leaves the room. A little while later an attendant enters and finds LORENZO dead.]

TO ONE ABSENT

RICH summer floods the earth; o'er hill and vale
Beauty reigns empress in her realm of green,
Deeming no single blade of grass too mean
To be her servitor; the nightingale
Voices his ecstasy till night grows pale
And lightens into day; while all between
Shy dawn and dark eyed dusk the woodland scene
Gives joyous heed to robin, thrush, and quail.

Oh, all this beauty in the hearts of trees
And all this music in the souls of birds
Can bring to me no solace and no ease:
Lacking the music of thy longed-for words,
Lacking the beauty of thy love-lit face,
How lovely, yet how loveless is this place!

SWINBURNE

HUSHED is the voice that set a world on fire,
Fanning men's passions with the breath of flame.
Yielding to Death's inexorable claim
He, whom no fear on earth could e'er inspire,
Hath loosed his vibrant fingers from the lyre
Whose music, echoing down the halls of fame,
Shall keep alive the wonder of his name,
The master melodist of the Victorian choir.

Oh, that his intuition were as pure,
His thoughts inspiring, as his notes are sweet!
How past compute his greatness would endure,
And mountain-high fame's blossoms at his feet!
The magic and the music of the sea
Were his who mastered not life's mystery.

THE LESSON

FROM the high-chair to my lap
When I take the little chap
How he smiles in baby glee,
For the best of friends are we!
Then I open wide the book
Guiding eager eyes to look
At the beasts all pictured there—
Tiger, horsey, moo-cow, bear!

His the rapture not alone
As the animals are shown.
Ah, the happy little boy
Shares with older eyes his joy;
For me, too, a new world lies
Open, full of sweet surprise.
Wondrous seem they, and how fair,
Tiger, horsey, moo-cow, bear!

Much we learn from sages' lore,
And from songs of poets more.
Let not sage or poet boast;
From small children learn we most.
Sin, and grief, and care depart,
And new magic floods the heart
When his sweet-toned notes declare
Tiger, horsey, moo-cow, bear!

THE GAME

"GET it," cries the little voice,
Voice of sweetness, voice of laughter,
Voice that bids the heart rejoice,—
"Get it," and he toddles after,
Fast as little legs can go
To the ball he fain would capture;
Falls upon it, gets it so,
Smiling with a child's sweet rapture.

Then again he throws the ball
Far as baby strength is able:
Sees it fall, and bound, and fall
'Twixt the bedstead and the table.
"Get it,"—and once more the quest,
So exciting, so beguiling,
Grants the little boy no rest
Till fresh triumph leaves him smiling.

Ah! if we could also play
Games with such a happy ending
Grief were further than to-day—
Hope and joy more near their blending;
But Fate flings the sphere of bliss
Past the reach of our endeavor,
And we touch it but to miss;—
Firmly we can hold it never!

IN THE WOODS

ROBERT

You guessed wherefore I bade you hunt with me
And would take no refusal?

SIDNEY

You know I am a hunter; so are you.
The day is clear, the deer here plentiful.
What need is there to seek for cause beside?

ROBERT

It seems you are less quick in fathoming
The minds of men than reaching tender depths
In hearts of women.

SIDNEY

Speech in metaphor
Is a fair road when once the goal is clear;
Confusing else, and I know not your aim.
Therefore use simple words, direct and few.

ROBERT

We came here two; one only shall go forth.
Can you now follow where my thought's path leads?

SIDNEY

To murder, it would seem.

ROBERT

To murder? No.
There shall be equal chance between us both.
Yet wherefore ask you not the motive now
That moulds my action? Some well-feigned surprise
Would suit yourself and the occasion too.
Have you no questions?

SIDNEY

None. For well I know
Your jealous nature, and therein I find
All answers to all questions left unasked.
Yet to avert a murder still in germ
My word of honor here I give to you
That this October air God-free from taint
Is not more pure than Ellinor, your wife.

ROBERT

Your word of honor! *Honor* and *your* word!
The poisonous snake which strove to strike at you
As we came hither, and which now is dead,
Crushed by the stone you threw, might well have cried:
"Lo! I am innocent of ill intent
I swear it by mine own pure guilelessness!"
Your word of honor! Now 's no time for jest.

SIDNEY

By God! You drive me far. Robert, beware
Lest fury throw my courage to the winds
And make me weaken to the craven part
That you would have me play!

ROBERT

No craven part,
But man to man with Fate for arbiter.
The woods shall be our witnesses, and they
Shall keep our secret. Echoes from our guns
Shall echo into silence.

SIDNEY

And the world,
That million-headed Cerberus whose jaws

Will bite and rend unless you throw it sops,
How shall its hideous noise be quieted
If we should do this deed?

ROBERT

One often hears
Of accidents in hunting.

SIDNEY

Ellinor
Is innocent!

ROBERT

We spoke of accidents.
If you should live, it was a sudden shot
That leaped unhappy from your careless gun
Slaying the friend you loved. If I survive
The "your" becomes a "my," the "you" an "I,"
And in all else the tale unaltered stands.

SIDNEY

If both should fall?

ROBERT

I had not thought of that!
It is not likely. We must take the chance.
If one is wounded and the other dead,

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Why then, a stag swift turning in his flight
Took course between us, parted by some space,
And we, with thoughts all centring in the hunt,
Paid sadly for the strange leap of the beast
In injuring each the other, one to death.

SIDNEY

How easily you plan to circumvent
The world's suspicion of a future wrong.
And yet you have not power to oppose
Your own suspicions of a wrong not past,
Not present, and as far from being done
As deepest darkness is from brightest sun.

ROBERT

Waste not your strength in words that brand you false.
Swift bullets are the only argument
That can convince me now; for Ellinor,
She that was once my wife, has not denied
The cursèd truth you lying called a lie.
So now, the rifles, come!

SIDNEY

Denied? Denied?
Madman, you questioned her, insulted her,
And would have her deny? Do you not know

[92]

That highest purity and highest pride
Meet interfusing in the magic woof
Of a true woman's nature? Should she say:
"Nay, I am not the vile thing that you deem,"
And by her answer touch the lower plane
Whereon contemptible you questioning stand?

ROBERT

If Ellinor had loved me as I her
She would have recognized that love distraught
Can not be calmed by silence. But she loves
Not me, her husband. Come, we but waste words!

SIDNEY

Nay, wait! For thus I cannot let you die
Nor die myself. Know then that it is you
And only you she loves, and that her love
Because so deep and pure could never guess
The shallowness and murkiness of yours;
So shallow that suspicion's lightest breath
Roused furious waves of passion ruinous,
So murky that most hideous of thoughts
Found there swift welcoming. She could not see
Beneath dark accusation's awful mask
The love you say you bear her. Thus in pride

Her silence gave the answer to your words.
Had you but seen her heart, there had you read:
"Robert, you only, only you I love."

ROBERT

Perhaps within the barrel of my gun
Death at this moment lies in wait for you.
Yet standing on the verge whence at a bound
You leap into Eternity's vast realm
Where God—who knows?—gives justice unto all,
Here lying-lipped you bid your life adieu.
Well, courage is of many kinds. And now?

SIDNEY

And now that I have done my uttermost,
And can no more to make your mind grasp truth
Your eyes to see, your heart to feel—why then,
What if I say: "I will not fight with you"?

ROBERT

We came here two; one only shall go forth.

SIDNEY

This way or that way, it is murder still.
I will not fight the duel!

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ROBERT

Nay, you must;
For what are right and wrong but social use?
And you and I are now our only world
Wherein our wills are sanction for our deeds.
If we agree, thus shall the wrong be laid.
What need we care for statutes and for laws?
We are alone. The forest is our world.
We fear not death. Let us therefore agree.

SIDNEY

If we could go, if you could go alone
Unto the utmost reachings of the globe
Where the stars shiver in the northern cold
And in eternal ice the earth lies wrapped,
You would not be removed a millionth part
Of millionth inch of space from that stern bar
Whereat is given the verdict of men's deeds.
The minor customs of diverging times,
The usages that are the toll we pay
On life's full highway, these all readily
Can be thrown off in solitude, as one
Bathes naked in the forest, unashamed.
But his high sense of what to him at least
Is, was, and must be everlasting right,

The purpose to hold fast to honor's law
As his eyes, irrespective of all else,
Read justice, this no man can ever lose
Though of the human race he be the last,
Alone upon a devastated earth.
For highest honor is that honor high
Which to our higher selves we owe, a debt
That every man must ever recognize.
I will not fight the duel!

ROBERT

Self, self, self!
Can you not think of her, of Ellinor?
Unless you fight, I swear upon my word,
My word of honor that none may gainsay
Henceforth exposed to public gaze she goes
Smirched with disgrace, and branded with her shame.
Now will you face the combat like a man,
Or, like a coward, let the world's hard eyes
Dwell with contempt upon your Ellinor,
The woman whom you love?

[*A pause.*]

SIDNEY

That shall not be.
And I *do* love her. Come, take you your stand.
Your words have made we ready.

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ROBERT

God be thanked!

A hundred paces—will that be enough?

SIDNEY

Five times enough. If there's a deed to do,
Why, do it thoroughly or not at all.

ROBERT

If this is courage you are brave indeed.
If it is desperation's dying thrust
Then, too, I meet it gladly.—From this bush
Take you ten paces; ten steps will I take,
And then we turn. Give you the one word, "Fire,"
Whereat we shoot. You understand?

SIDNEY

Yes, all.

ROBERT

Have you your place?

SIDNEY

I have. And you?

ROBERT

I mine.

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SIDNEY

Fire!

[The smoke clears away.]

ROBERT

Your bullet struck me not.

SIDNEY

Nor did yours

Strike me.

ROBERT

Strange that an aim so straight as yours
Should at this distance fail!

SIDNEY

And no less strange
That you whose skill as hunter is far known
Should this time miss your mark!

[A pause.]

Why did you wish

To spare my life?

ROBERT

Because of Ellinor
Whom I so love despite her guilt with you

[98]

That if my death together with your life
May bring her happiness and lasting peace
My gun shall fail while yours, please God, aims true.
This is the truth. The truth now tell to me.
Wherefore shot you amiss?

SIDNEY

Because of her,
Of Ellinor, your wife who loves but you,
And whom I love, and for whose peace and joy
I count it happiness to lose my life;
By mine own death thus giving proof to you
Of that for which my word did not suffice.
This is the truth. Will you believe me now?
[*A pause.*]

ROBERT

Can you forgive me, Sidney?

SIDNEY

I forgive.

ROBERT

And Ellinor, will she forgive, think you?

[99]

SIDNEY

Love pardons all, and of to-day's events
She need not ever know. The woods grow dark.
Let us be going. Yonder is the path. . . .
How they will twit us when they see us come
Without a partridge even from the hunt!

NAPOLEON IN HELL

AROUND him in wild flaming surges seethed
The furious tumult: crazed with wrath the horde
Whose fierce reverberated shriekings poured
Torrential on him; close and closer breathed
Mad visages of awful vengeance, wreathed
With flames less ardent than the passion stored
In souls that cursed the Corsican whose sword
Had in their blood and in their hearts been sheathed.

A mother thrust before his eyes the limb
Of her son mangled, saying: "Eat the dead
Who battered on the living";—spat on him,—
The man whose will had been all Europe's dread!
He saw her not, nor heard the hellish crew,
Still silent brooding over Waterloo.

THE MOOD OF BLISS

THE slightest touch of the careless hand
Mars forever the butterfly's wing,
Nor any artist in any land
Its pristine beauty shall restore
To the perfect thing, the fragile thing
Forevermore.

The slightest tones of the careless word
To the mood of bliss an end will bring,
And its return, O hearts deep-stirred,
In vain, alas, you will implore
Of the perfect thing, the subtle thing
Forevermore.

LYRIC

LOVELY lily of the lake,
White and gold and fair to see,
What is all your loveliness
Now to me?

Glorious cloud that cleaves the sky,
To the highest angels dear,
Can you say, " Take heart, take heart,
She is here " ?

She is gone from out my sight
Who is fair as ye are fair.
Lilies now are foolish leaves;
Clouds but air !

COMPENSATION

SMITE, smite, smite on the anvil of life, O Man,
With courage for your hammer, that you perfect your plan;
And if the goal you reach not, this thought shall be your
pay:
The sparks struck forth by your hand will light another's
way.

THE TROOPS RETURNING

TRIUMPHANT banners hid the smiling sky,
While blossoms clustered under marching feet;
The shouts of welcome ringing down the street
Drowned in their joy a sonless mother's cry.

NIGHT IN ALASKA

THE lofty mountains with the starry sky
In still communion stand; the wooded shores
Whisper a soundless message to the waves,
And, in the quiet of the night, the soul
Perceives its kinship with the infinite.
When, lo! the winds bear down an eagle's cry
That rends the silence with an earthly sound
And breaks the spell which wove the world in one!

AN INSCRIPTION

COULD words express thy loveliness
Or pen and ink thy charms
This pen would covered be with rust,
The ink would dry and turn to dust
Before my words of praise, dear friend,
Could reach their end.

LINES SUGGESTED BY THE STATUE OF LIBERTY

THE foam of ocean kisses lies white about the feet
Of her whose flames are blisses to all the eyes they greet.
A statue such as this is, when shall you ever meet?
Not in beauty, not in worth.
Counted forth in bronze or gold,
But such loveliness as earth
Never fully wrought of old.
To the shackled a releasing,
To the loyal a caressing,
And to all the world a blessing—
Ay, a blessing manifold.

Greece was for the Greeks alone;
Her arms stretch to all mankind,
Yearningly a little more
To the wretched and the poor
Who at last a haven find on her hospitable shore;
Symbol, guide, and inspiration
Of the freedom and compassion, heart and heart blood, of
our nation.

When in mingled bronze to mould
Or to carve in massive stone
Virtues such as these,
Mighty masters, have you known,
Phidias and Praxiteles?
Beauty, beauty was your theme.—
There are times when all endeavor
Looms a worthless toil forever,
And only beauty's visions seem
The soul's oases in life's desert dream.

I too, am beauty's servitor;
I kneel and worship her;
I would not make her loveliness
The shadow of a whisper less.
But yet, beyond the mists, afar,
At heaven's highest height behold the steadfast star!
We see it, hushed and wondering,
In this imperfect world the only perfect thing.

CARL SCHURZ

**His conscience knew not compromise;
He never stooped to rise;
And all the honors of this world
Were less than honor, in his eyes.**

THE BISHOP'S DREAM

THE Bishop sat writing and writing away
For the King was coming to church that day,
And he vowed that the heart of his liege should be stirred
By his lofty strain and eloquent word.
So he sought in a thousand careful ways
To prune this sentence and turn that phrase
Till his themes be wrought in their proper relation:
Chastity, courage, and abnegation.
For he knew that the grant of a boon was at stake
Such as King could yield and Bishop take.
Power and wealth in the balance hung,
And he counted much on his honied tongue.
Nor in vain; for his discourse, people say,
Rose on inspired wings that day.
E'en in frivolous hearts his words sank deep
And hardened courtiers were seen to weep.

The King at the doors of the church stood awhile;
Half mournful, it may be, his quizzical smile.
For a moment he saw, down time's vista, the youth
Whom years had not robbed of his faith in men's truth—

A noble young prince!—The King sighed as he glanced
Where the splendid form of the prelate advanced.
“Indeed, my lord Bishop, your lofty words stole
Deep into my heart, far into my soul.
Glad I am that my people should have such a guide
To point them the pitfalls of passion and pride.
The virtuous courage you knew to display
Has left me in debt, and the King will repay.”

Whereat the other uncovered his head.
“The praise of my liege is great honor,” he said;
And his crafty mind coined, with a thrill of elation,
Swift into gold the King’s commendation.

That evening, just at the stroke of eight,
The Bishop entered the palace gate,
Revolving his plans, and wondering
Whether his seat would be next to the King,
Or if—and as well—his neighbor would be
The Duchess de Tours or the Duke de Crècy.
Imagine, then, the thoughts of his Grace
On meeting his partner face to face,—
Madame Léonore de l’Espinaisse!

Search me the whole of the kingdom o’er,
But you find no second Léonore.

Hers was the soul of Egypt's Queen,
Or the lustful soul of the Roman Faustine.
And none had dared but a willful king
To bring to his feast such a shameless thing.

The Bishop drew back and his face flamed red
E'er it paled with the pallor of the dead.
He felt, unseeing, the courtiers' gaze
As they watched his countenance in amaze.
A moment he stood, twixt wrath and fear,
Till the monarch's soft voice fell on his ear:
"No greater honor, my lord, I deem
Than her whom I hold in most esteem
To place at your side, could I surely show
To one who the worth of such favor will know."

Chastity, courage—these words sound well
Where the vaulted cathedral arches swell,
But too holy they are to be made the sport
Of rollicking lords in a ribald court.
And deed and speech, as all wise men know,
Cannot always through life together go.
Moreover, who holds the King's heart (*entre nous*),
Holds for the time his purse-strings too.
So the Bishop murmured, "Great good, little harm";
And turned to the lady, and offered his arm.

* * * * *

Over the rivers and valleys of France
The sun had cast his earliest glance
When, softly ensconced in his cushions deep,
My lord the Bishop at last sought sleep.
But the unkind god of slumber it seems
Did naught but grant him unquiet dreams:
Some confused, others clear; yet in all, to the fore
Rose the form and the face of la belle Léonore;
And ever a silken tassel hung
From her braceleted arm, and ever there clung
A beast thereunto: now a traitorous snake,
Now a swine she would lash, now a cur she would shake;
But whatever the guise (O God, grant us grace!)
The animal had the Bishop's face!

How he sought to cast off the vision's spell,
How he cursed her, a demon come from Hell,
Let none seek to know, and none hope to tell.
But most his heart sank when an Angel arose
And spake: "Her slave thou, wherever she goes;
Her slave, till thy dust returns unto dust,
Who traitor hast proved to the holiest trust.
Prostitute she of the body, 't is true;
But soul's prostitute is the worse of the two."

The Bishop awoke, his face ashen grey,
And trembling he tore the curtains away.
Across the great bed the sun's warm rays streamed;
Cheerfully on the red velvet they gleamed.
"It was a strange dream that I dreamed,"
The Bishop, stretching his white arms, said;
"The wine last night must have gone to my head."

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PASSAGES FROM " ESTHER "

THE following excerpts are from an unpublished play entitled ESTHER, whose plot, for the most part, follows closely along the lines of the biblical story, and whose very language is in places adapted from the speech of the biblical personages. In the first of the passages here printed, THE GOLDEN VASE, the attempt is made to depict the character of the Oriental despot Ahasuerus at the height of its overweening vanity, its subtle capriciousness, its resentful cruelty, and its power of splendid imagination. The first of these traits, again revealed in the scene entitled ESTHER AND THE KING, makes evident the danger incurred by Esther in later going unsummoned before Ahasuerus to plead for her people. In the last excerpt there are contrasted the characters of Mordecai, the finest type of the patriarchal Jew, and Haman, who dies as he has lived, a cunning and vindictive man.

THE GOLDEN VASE

[*A room in the palace. The KING is reclining on a couch, examining a golden vase. Near him stands HARBONA, the chamberlain.*]

THE KING (*angrily*)

Shall I be sport for workmen? Answer me!
Shall clumsy artisans thus mutilate
And with their damnèd chisels level down
My great pre-eminence? Ay, answer me!
Look now upon this little manikin,
This figurine that holds these tiny reins,
Whilst at his side a very charioteer
Stands in all semblance equal. Look on this,
And say, is this the King?

HARBONA (*examining the vase*)

My lord, be mild
And patient with me, for indeed I see
A battle with triumphant skill portrayed,
And in the direst of the conflict you,

Our king and victor, brave beyond compare,
To whom the lion is a cowering cur,
And timid e'en the ravening wolf. Your car
Doth overroll with strong relentless wheels
The prostrate forms of seven enemies.
And javelins fly, whilst you, unharmed, command.
All doth appear with cunning art designed,
Each man and beast in due proportion drawn.

THE KING (*mockingly*)

"In due proportion," disproportionate fool!
Is it my due that such proportion reigns
As shall endow a driven beast, this horse,
With the appearance of a sturdier strength
Than in the King's presentment doth inhere?
And see this common soldier! Doth he not
Ahasuerus in his height o'ertower?
Nay, by this scurvy artist I am made
A mock for piteous laughter!

HARBONA

Yet, great lord,
He doth but follow nature, she who gives
To all their form and stature, grace and strength,
Among their fellow men of woman born.

THE KING

This thought that you would bring for his excuse
Doth all the more enrage me; it hath coursed
A myriad times, a madness through my veins,
Burning its path, like flood of living fire,
And threatening my reason. That I, I,
The ruler of all regions, should perforce
Look up, look up, look up to statelier men,
Or see the mighty muscle of a slave
Outswell the moderate power of my arm
As wind-filled sails of ships on Asian seas
Excel in natural majesty the sheets
Of puny barks beside our river banks!
Shall my humiliation be set down,
In metal graven, or on canvas kept,
And I, whose spirit is divine, be shown
Throughout the years, a man 'mongst other men?

HARBONA

But hath not art, for all its servitors
Firm laws of form and color, that do bring
With their obedience beauty, but, transgressed,
Condemn unto oblivion the o'erbold?

THE KING (*taking the vase again*)

Art hath no laws so great as is my will
Which is the sum and substance of all law.
You do forget that art exists for me,
Not I for art. Be silent now, and hear
How on this vase the prescient man had wrought
With truest knowledge of his art's domain
Ahasuerus. Here where soldiers swarm
In clusters thick upon the wave of war
My form had towered, resolute and firm,
A mighty pillar. O'er the moving host
My arm o'erstretched had covered multitudes
Fearing its wrathful fall. Mine enemies
Had in the shadow of each finger felt
Oppression of eternal night, and groped
Like sailors desolate in the sun's eclipse;
While from mine eyes, whose circumscribèd size
The largest Persian shield were small beside,
Flashed forth to foe the flame of fiercest fire,
But light of perfect hope unto mine own.
My breast had heaved with triumph passionate
And from my lips the eager breath rushed forth,
A whirlwind scattering ruin. On my head
The royal crown, with pearls and sapphires set,
Had gleamed half lost in clouds, as if the gods

Were placing majesty upon my brow.—
So had I filled all earth and reached to heaven;
So had the artist wisely wrought my form
More like my spirit.

[He dashes the vase angrily across the room]

But this cursèd dog
Hath made of me a man like other men.

HARBONA

Forgive him, King, who blindly did blaspheme.

THE KING

Let him be blinded. Then will I forgive.
Let him be blinded, Harbona. I would
Not have him carve such images again.
Go! I have said.

ESTHER AND THE KING

THE KING

Ah, my queen,
How like a fragrant lily you are come
To bless mine eyes with beauty's purity.
[He kisses her]

ESTHER

Your graciousness bestows my grace on me.

THE KING

Not so, sweet Esther. Does the wilding rose
Whose orange petals perfume Nishapur,
Or slender stalks of hyacinthine blue
Thrusting their spikèd jewels in the air,—
Do tulips riotous in color rich,
And violets burdened with the soul of May,
Gather in royal gardens deeper grace?

ESTHER

With maiden lips unkindled by the sun
No bud could leap to perfect blossoming,
But must in hidden beauty pass away.
So I the gift to you the giver bring,
As rivers bear their waters to the sea,
Father of clouds whose rain hath fed the brooks.
Take then my little all, and count its worth
Poor in itself, yet rich in my desire
Of good and greater good and greatest good
For you, dear King, for you.

[She kneels and kisses his hand]

THE KING

The words that dance upon your singing lips
Have caught the wonder of your soul. They seem
With supernatural harmony infused
And form a part of your compelling charm.
Now they are nymphs in loving bondage twined,
Swaying in gracious unison to sounds
Enchanted and enchanting. Now your words
To my enamoured senses do appear
A mystic garland plucked in Paradise
And woven by some spirit of great peace
Whose wings are rainbows.

ESTHER

See, O dear my lord,
How your own words outrun my halting tongue,
So that now in comparison's fair light
Your glowing praise doth dim that which it praises.
As silence unto sound, as death to life,
As nothing unto all, so does my speech
Express the fulness of my love for you.
My words are shadowy symbols of a sun
Whose heat would burn the founts of language dry
And make the greatest poet's head to bend
In reverential silence.

THE KING

All this love
Called forth alone by me?

ESTHER

By you alone.
Ah, take this light of love which is my soul
And use it as you will and while you will.
It is to me a radiance of pure joy
If you but value it. If not, dear lord,
A burning heat within a barren heart.

THE KING

Fear not my negligence. You are become
Too sweet a portion, Esther, of my life
For me to lose you now. Come sit by me
And of your admiration strive to tell.

*[Esther seats herself on the divan beside the KING, who
reclines]*

ESTHER

I think you are most splendid of all kings.
You have imagination more than gods
And are to me the kindest amongst men.
These all were reasons for my love, O King,
Did not my love transcend all reasoning.
Yet do I in your courage glory much
And in your dreams hold revel with the stars,
And shed for all your kindness grateful tears.

THE KING

Dear Esther!

ESTHER

Feel. My eyes are wet, O King.

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THE KING

A little while ago, and I was wroth
Because an artist made me to mine eyes
Appear a man 'mongst men. Ah, sorceress,
You have bewitched me in the magic ring
Of love's enchanted ground, and I confess
That, now, exultant with thrice-thrilling joy,
I feel myself a mortal man, relieved
Of lonely universal projects vast,
And weightier far than this great crown of gold
Which with both hands I lay aside. Ah, now
I am a man beloved by a woman!

[He takes her warmly in his arms]

ESTHER

Your words have poured a flood of ecstasy,
Bathing my being in a perfect joy.
At last the dreamed-of moment circles round
And finds us here together, heart to heart,
A man and woman, lover and beloved,
Beloved and lover, equal in their love.

*[The KING puts her suddenly out of his arms, and
takes up his crown.]*

THE KING (*angrily*)

Equal! Did you say "equal" unto me?
That is a word I never thought to hear!

ESTHER

Oh pardon, King! My speech but followed out
The path you carved for it. Your words were—

THE KING

Mine!

My words were mine! But what I of myself
May choose to say, think you all others dare?
In naught have I an equal, and in love,
Which holds amongst the passions foremost place,
As I the leader am of earth-born kings,
There is most surely none who is my peer!

ESTHER

I kiss your hand, O master and my lord,
And beg forgiveness, with an humble heart.

THE KING

Make unto this no second error then,
And I do now forgive and now forget.

THE DOWNFALL OF HAMAN

[A public square in the City of Shushan. In the background stands a high gallows. As the curtain rises MORDECAI and THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARDS are revealed in the foreground. MORDECAI is clothed in a robe of linen and purple, covered by a cloak of blue and white. A crown of gold is on his head and golden chains almost cover his breast.]

MORDECAI

So Haman dies to-day. The wheel of fate
Hath ta'en a mighty turn, sped by the hand
Of favoring Jehovah. Here stand I
Clad in the garment of nobility
And weighty with much gold.

THE CAPTAIN

Lord Mordecai,
The King in honoring you but followeth
The pointing of divinity's own hand
And precedent august.

MORDECAI

What meaning here?

THE CAPTAIN

When coarsest sackcloth stung your agèd breast
And in drab tatters hung where now clings gold
In carved clusters, even then were you
Clad in the garment of nobility;
For through the raggedness there shone your soul,
And weighty with much wisdom were your words.

MORDECAI

I think you speak not as a flatterer
But as a friend. Sincerity doth make
Your speech sonorous to my grateful ears.
I thank you.

THE CAPTAIN

All of Shushan doth rejoice,
Not I alone at your new dignities.

MORDECAI

But tell me,—for though generally I know
These three days' happenings and Haman's fall,
Yet have not heard from Esther's lips the whole,—
Tell me now all, each slightest word, each act

That were enclosed within the fateful hour
When trembling swayed upon a woman's tongue
Judæa's destiny.

THE CAPTAIN

Thus it befell:

Ere the fourth dawn that followed your bold act
Had from the bare sides of the neighboring hills
Unwrapped the shadowy garment of the night,
Esther, unbid, in royal vesture stood
Revealed in azure veilings crystalline
And glorious in fearless loveliness
Before the astonished King. Death held his scythe
Suspended in mid-air and motionless;
Upon the flowing sands within his glass
Time laid his agèd hand, and they were still;
Whilst Justice plucked the bandage from her eyes
To gaze on Esther's beauty.

MORDECAI

You become
A poet, soldier.

THE CAPTAIN

Verily, her deed
And all its mystic setting make me so.
For some there are, and of that number I,

Who, awe-struck, will past every doubting swear
That while the King debated, and her life
And all Judæa's in the balance hung,
A rushing wind, as fearing to be late,
Bore through the open gates, and brought to us
The voice of distant thunder, and the voice
With godlike accents fell upon our souls.

MORDECAI

Jehovah's was it, guardian of our race.
Praised be his Holy Name!

THE CAPTAIN

The King's eyes leaped
With sudden fire, and trembling held he out
His golden sceptre unto Esther saved,
And lovingly he spake these words to her:
"What will you, Esther, what is your request?
It shall be given to you though you ask
The half of this my kingdom."

MORDECAI

What said she?

THE CAPTAIN

She said: "If it seem good unto the King
Let him and Haman come this very day

Unto the feast I have prepared for them."
And when they came, she bade them come once more
Upon the morrow, and again they came.

MORDECAI

Now bid the spirit that doth hold the key,
Throw open wide your gates of memory,
For you have come unto the mighty hour
That shall endure until all time be lost
And our race ended with the whole world's end.

THE CAPTAIN

Each word that crossed the threshold of that door,
Whereby I listening stood, hath found a niche
Within my mind; nor have I aught forgotten,
Nor shall I aught forget. Much wine they drank,
The King and Haman, and with ardent eyes
Ahasuerus gazed upon his Queen.
Again said he to her: "What will you, Queen?
It shall be given to you, though you ask
The half of this my kingdom." Esther spake:
"If I have met with favor in your sight,
And if it please the King, then let my life
Be given me at my petitioning,
And all my people's life at my request.
For we are sold, I and my people sold,

To be destroyed, to perish, and be slain!
But if we had been sold in bondage, I
Had held my peace, although the adversary
Could not have compensated to the King
For damage of our loss. But he desires,
Methinks, not only this most dread revenge
Because a noble Jew, the Mordecai
Who saved your life, would not bow down to him.
His plan, 't would seem, aspires far more high.
In the revulsion of the populace
Against such ruthless act of your strong hand,
He well may find a hopeful chance whereby
Ahasuerus subtly to destroy,
And wear himself that very golden crown
Whereon Lord Haman looks."

Then spake the King:

"Who is he, and where is he, that doth dare
So in his heart to do?" And Esther said:
"An adversary and an enemy;
Even this wicked Haman."

[*A messenger enters and after saluting gives a paper to THE CAPTAIN, who reads it. The messenger departs.*]

THE CAPTAIN

Soon he comes
By soldiery surrounded to his death.

MORDECAI

Make haste. I hunger for each syllable.
What said the King when Esther's speech found end?

THE CAPTAIN

Like to a whirlwind rose he then in wrath,
Like to a whirlwind when it grasps the waves,
And twists them into mountains, while the sands
Are hurled into the valleys of the sea.
His face most royally empurpled was
With rage and wine. His eyes had tiger's glint,
As unto him he thundered: "Is this true?"

MORDECAI

How strove the snake to glide from out the net?

THE CAPTAIN

His cunning fled him. Haman's cunning fled
As flees a fawn when terror hath possessed it.
With stricken eyes he stared upon the Queen,
And, like a note upon a broken chord,
His wailing voice was tremulous and thin.

MORDECAI

No melody from an angelic harp,
Nor any hymn of wingèd seraphim,

Than myriad roses making sweeter far
The intermediate air, could bear to me
Such perfect joy as Haman's broken voice
When he, my people's brazen foe, at bay
Stood, hopeless, in the presence of the King.
How answered he Ahasuerus then?

THE CAPTAIN

As though fate bade him, Haman's words were these:
"The fear of beauty falleth on my soul,
And Esther's anger flaming from her eyes
Doth so illumine them with God-like wrath
That it well seems as if Jehovah's flame
Were stored within those dark imperial orbs,
Forth-leaping thence to scorch my trembling heart.
Think not, Ahasuerus, that your wrath,
Though it bespeaks the rage of countless men,
Legions in myriad, swift to do your will,
So overpowers and o'ermasters me
As Esther's glance. You speak a nation's word
And in your voice I hear a nation's tones
Threatening destruction. Nor will I deny
That I do fear you, though I do deny
That I in aught am treacherous to you.
Yet what availeth speech? Through Esther's lips
God is demanding my deep punishment,

And from unrisen mists the future cries,
Vengeance, vengeance, on Judæa's foe.
But, queenly Esther, be now more than Queen;
Be not the Jewess seeking for revenge.
Ah, be a woman of whom years shall say:
She saved her race by being true to it,
And letting truth and beauty plead for it;
She raised her race by being more than it,
In loving mercy far exceeding it.
Your race and you I would have wronged, O Esther,
Yet show compassion even unto me
And, by a mercy great as was my sin,
Hide me from the King's anger, and erect
A monument of glory to your people."

MORDECAI

What due reply gave then the Queen to him?

THE CAPTAIN

"No wall of pity that my words might build
Could so surround your crime's most guilty sphere
As to make hidden the o'ertopping growth
Of cruel deeds your cruel will had led to.
I judge you not by that which you have done,
The letters to the satraps of the King
And to the judges of his provinces

That yet must lead to bloodshed; and, more close
To mine own heart, your plot 'gainst Mordecai.
These I would now indeed forgive, O Haman,
Because I am so happy in my love.
Nor do I judge you by the issue dread
Had not Ahasuerus heard my plea,
With ear attuned to kindness and affection.
The rude extermination of my tribe
In these wide lands, the flow of children's blood,
The anguished cry of nursing mothers, all
The awful sounds and sights of furious war,
The lasting sorrow in Judæan breasts,
I might forgive, though all my racial blood
Leaps in my veins with clamor for revenge,
I might forgive, O Haman, ah, dear King,
Because I am so happy in my love.
Not, therefore, Haman, on what you have done,
Or hoped to do, shall I in judgment stand.
Thus far my mercy goes, led by my love.
But I will judge by that which you would do
Unto my people, Mordecai and me,
Now, even now, if you all-powerful
Should yet remain."

MORDECAI

And Haman answered?

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THE CAPTAIN

"Queen

No harm I planned you." Whereat Esther smiled
And said unto him, "Knowing not my blood;
But let that pass! What then of Mordecai,
And of my people?" Haman hid his face,
And said unto her, "All my enemies
I now would pardon." But she laughed aloud
And scornful echoed, "Now would pardon, Haman?
A twofold meaning lurks within your words.
Now you would pardon, now that death waits near.
But if that *now* should be a *now* of power
How then, O Haman, would the Hebrews fare?
Look in my eyes and answer." Haman kept
His visage hid, and answered, "They should be
By me forgiven, and so Mordecai."

MORDECAI

How plucked she truth from lying lips?

THE CAPTAIN

She spake:

"You looked not in mine eyes. Why looked you not?
Is life, O Haman, worth thus low a lie?
So proud a coward I have never seen
Nor any noble so ignoble known."

MORDECAI

And then?

THE CAPTAIN

With head erect Lord Haman spake:

“Nay, Esther, see I gaze upon your face,
And thus make answer to your questioning.
If Mordecai and all the Hebrew race
Were now within my power, they should be
By me forgiven—nay, I recall my words.
I cannot look into those eyes and lie.”

MORDECAI

Jehovah's torch with truth invincible
Had kindled them. Blessed be his Holy Name!

THE CAPTAIN

Then Esther slew him with her eyes, and spake:
“Who hath no pity can no pity win.
Hate begets hate. Your cruel heart, O Haman,
Doth seal your cruel fate, whose ordering
I leave unto the King.”

MORDECAI

A queenly speech,
Most worthy of a daughter of the Law.

THE CAPTAIN

Whereat the King, to gather time for thought,
With angry step into the garden strode.
There oleanders in warm fragrance bloomed
Thrusting far forth upon the innocent air
Great branches poisonous (so lurks at times
Near beauty peril) laden with the freight
Of white and crimson blossoms. While he paced,
Contending with emotions yet opposed,
(For much he leant upon his minister,)
The life-imperilled Haman strove within
To touch with pity Esther's burning heart.
Where she reclined on a golden couch
He knelt in supplication, nor refrained
With anguished clutch to seize her garment's hem.
The King returned, a sudden thunderbolt,
Keen lightning in his eyes, and saw the twain
With wine-enflamed vision. "Ho," cried he,
"Will he then force the Queen before my sight?
Here in my house?" And as the word went forth
I and my men with flashing swords rushed in,
And covered Haman's face. "Let him be hanged,"
Ahasuerus spake, "upon the gallows
That he for Mordecai prepared hath."

*[There is heard the fanfare of trumpets and the sound of
approaching men.]*

THE CAPTAIN

They come with Haman. So the story ends.

[Enter a group of soldiers with Haman in their centre. His hands are bound behind him. There follows a shouting rabble. Haman stops as he sees Mordecai, and sneers.]

HAMAN

Come you to gloat, old greybeard, ere I die?
Even a jackal waiteth for the death,
Ere, noiselessly as moonlight, he steals on.
You Jews are beastlier than the very beasts!
Or come you here to pluck from misery
Sententious wisdom for your fellow-swine?
It is a pastime that philosophers
Most tenderly enjoy.

MORDECAI

No bitter word
Shall cross my lips against a dying man.
Jehovah weighed you in his perfect scales,
And found you wanting, and pronounced your doom.

HAMAN

The victor easily may moralize
And call good fortune by the name of justice.

I hear your smooth old tongue roll oily phrase
Unto admiring auditors: "Behold
Where once the wicked Haman strode in pomp,
Whilst I, most ragged, waited at the gate;
But here in purple him in chains I saw.
So virtue triumphs, vice is punished."
Bah! How I scorn you, good Lord Mordecai

MORDECAI

If scorning gives you courage, you are welcome.

HAMAN

But though upon your withered finger gleams
The ring authoritative which to me
Ahasuerus gave, then took away,
Still are you doomed to death, beyond reprieve,
You and your cursèd kinsmen, one and all.
For what the Persian King hath once decreed
Is not reversible, but like time's stream
Proceeds unchecked, irrevocable law;
And what he hath already signed, endures;
And though I die, Judæa is destroyed.

MORDECAI

The kindly solace of this cruel thought
I must deny you, Haman, for the King

Hath since been pleased to grant and to command
The Jews be warned, and be allowed to stand
In groups defensive throughout all the land,
To slay, destroy and cause to perish all
That would assault or take the spoil of them
On Adar's thirteenth day. Thus are they saved.
The glowing ardor of the King's decree
Hath caused my fear for them to melt away
As mist dissolves, pierced by the radiant arrows
Shot from the glorious quiver of the sun.

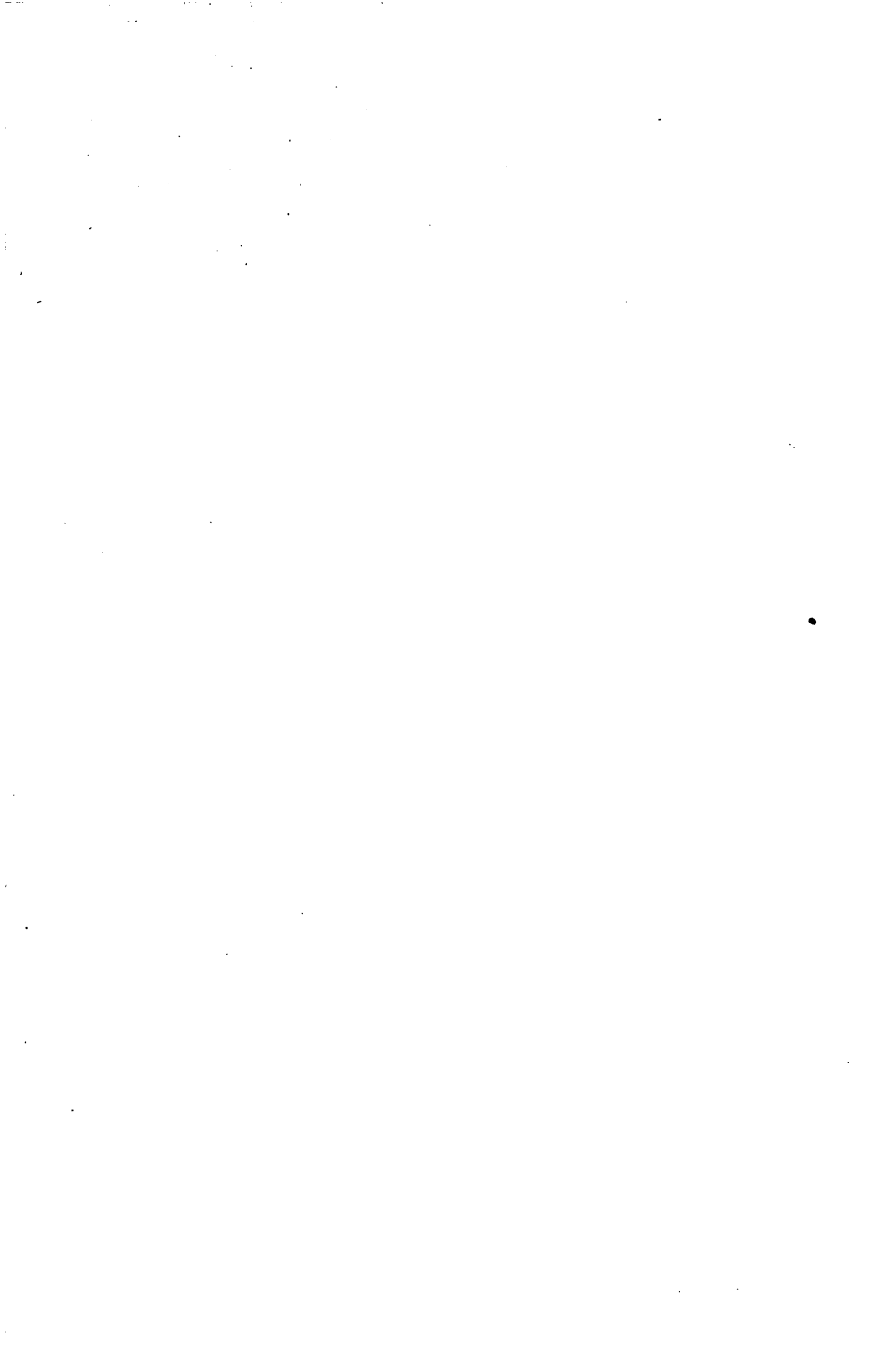
HAMAN

So, for the present, vengeance hath escaped me.
My life, a barren tree, sinks fruitless down
To all-begetting, all-entombing earth.
The siren shadows lure me to their arms.
Soon shall the flutter of a moth's soft wing,
The locust's buzz in silent summer nights,
Be of more import to the living world
Than Haman, erstwhile master of this realm.
Yet ere I go, mark this, Lord Mordecai:
Though all my plans have vanished like pale dreams,
Yet shall your hated race, at other hands
More powerful than mine, in other climes,
Suffer the stroke of persecution's lash,
Revilement's keen abuse, the harsh decree

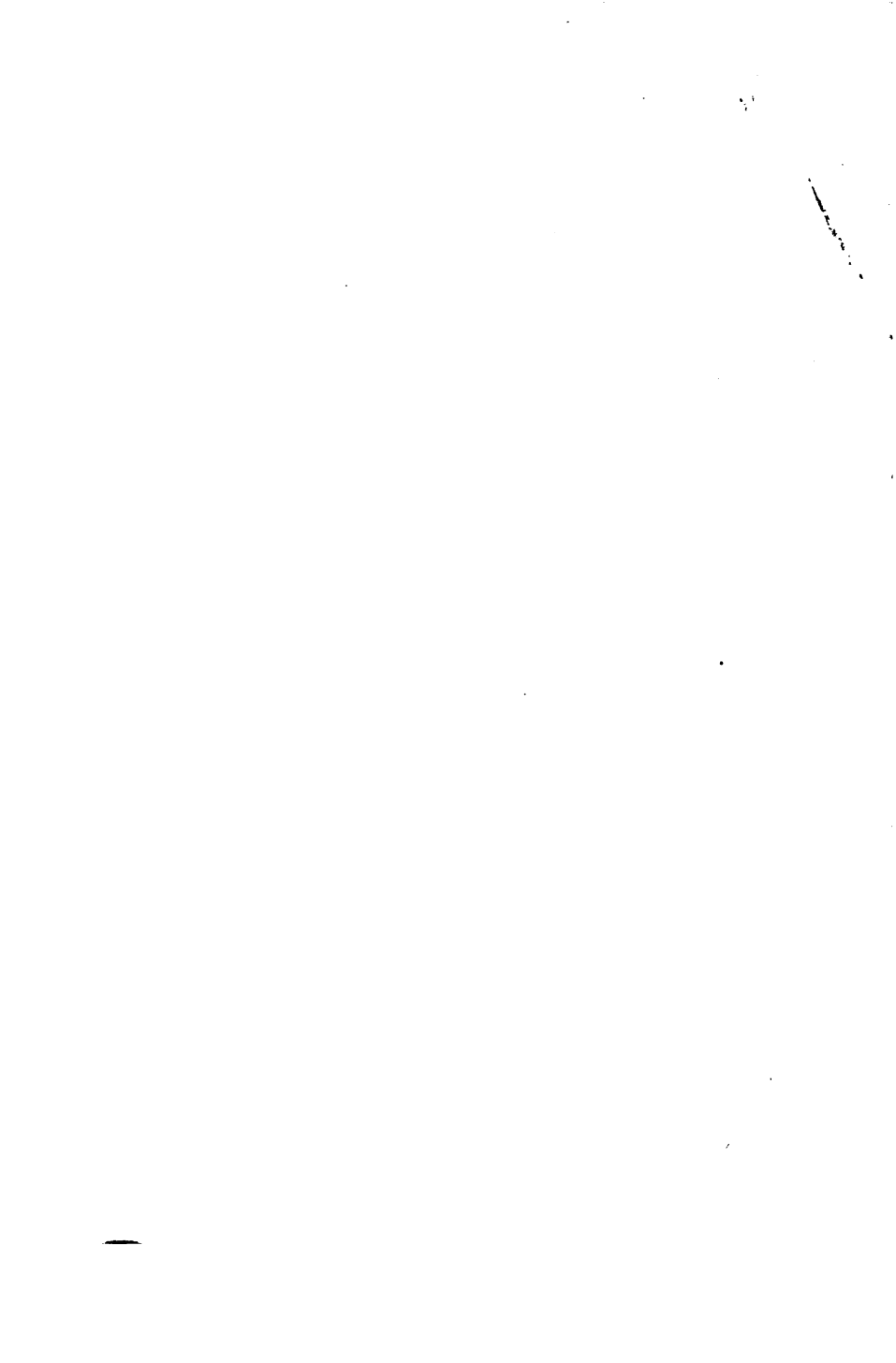
Of envious legislation, and much woe.
Undoubting this do I go down to death,
And this undoubting, thus far comforted.

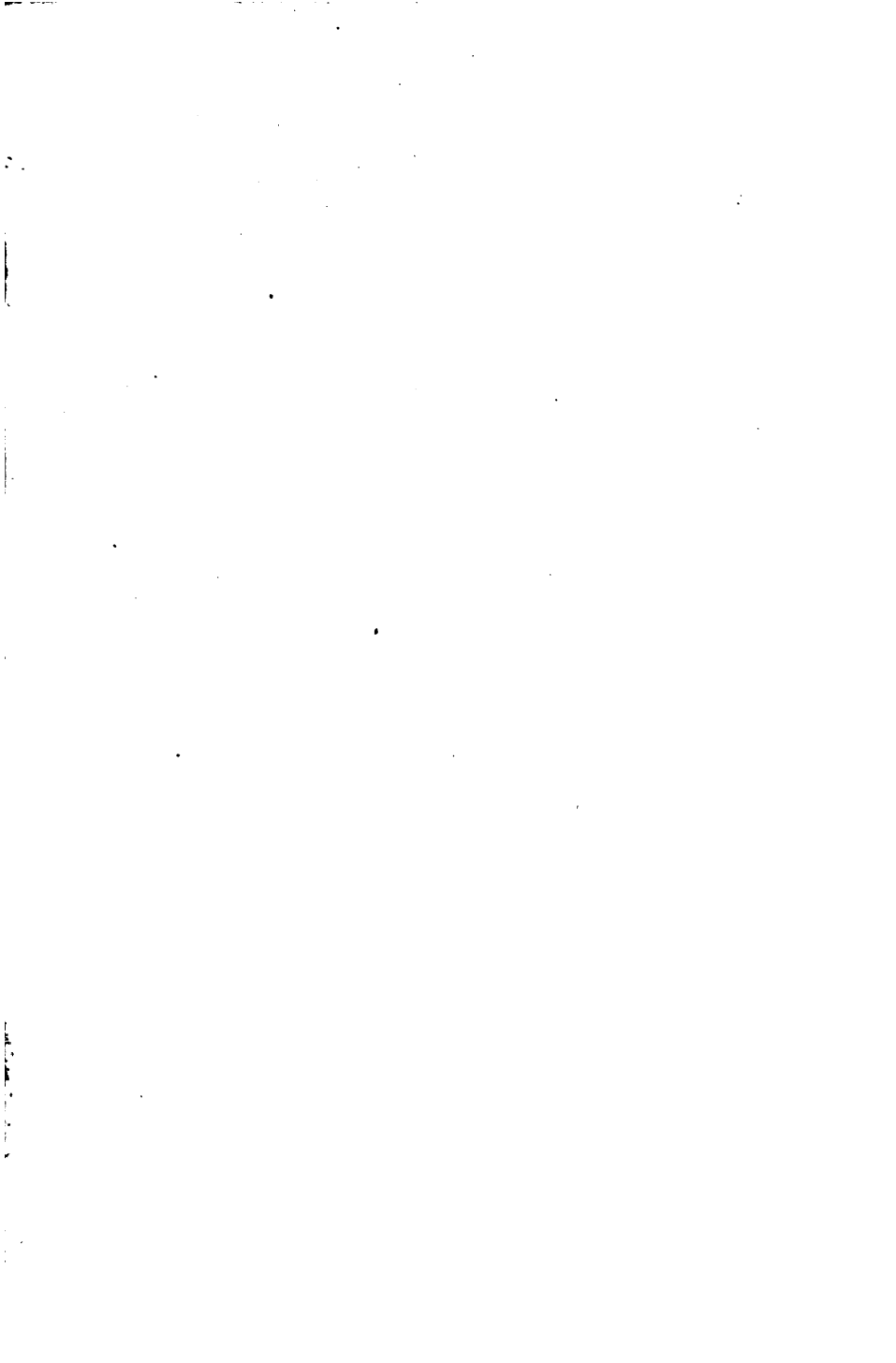
MORDECAI

God's will be done! But we with steadfast gaze
Shall face the future, howsoe'er it come.









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